

**THE COMPASSION INITIATIVE:
A COMPASSION PRACTICE BASED CURRICULUM FOR EMERGING ADULTS**

A Professional Project

presented to

the Faculty of

Claremont School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment

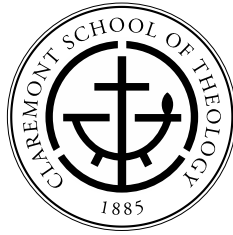
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Abstract

Utilizing *The Compassion Practice* and other spiritual and contemplative exercises, this project seeks to address the rising levels of anxiety, depression, and fear prevalent in the lives of emerging adults. By equipping them with the tools for integrating self-compassion and compassion for others, participants can then discern compassionate actions in the world. Engaged compassion is empowering and leads to beneficial action both inwardly and externally. This seven-session curriculum based on Frank Roger's *Compassion in Practice: The Way of Jesus* has been developed with emerging adults in mind and practiced with college students connected with Wesley Foundation United Methodist Campus Ministries in Michigan. The class offers participants steps in personal discovery while grounding them in compassion. Through this spiritual growth experience, participants are equipped with tools to reduce anxiety and to respond compassionately.

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Introduction

Rarely does a month go by in the United States without an act of violence that captures national attention. These acts of violence take multiple forms: physical altercations, mental and emotional violence against marginalized persons, and self-inflicted harm, to name just a few. The rhetoric of hate continues to own a space in the landscape of this nation, dividing and taking hold of every opportunity to rise up and create division and fear. Into this anxious space, the Christian Church has a unique opportunity to shine forth the light of compassion. Delving deep into the soul of human connection, the Church occupies a unique space to speak the truth of Sacred Love and to equip leaders who embody the call of the prophet Micah to “act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly.”¹ Mainline Protestant churches are getting smaller and older on average, while despairing over a younger generation of persons who are “missing.” What will happen as the baby boomers go on to Glory, and the pews that were once filled to overflowing are now empty? How can the Christian Church at large be a force of positive change and person-to-person connection for younger people who hope to positively influence the world? Can this occur when the Church is in survival mode? One answer could involve engaging emerging adults differently. The reality of this missing generation, those occupying the ages of 18-29, is that they are not really missing at all. In fact, it is the Church that is missing them. Speaking from the perspective of a not-quite-40-year-old ordained Elder in The United Methodist Church, I find that churches long to perform ministry for young adults, rather than with them. We fail to engage young adults as persons with knowledge, insight, and direction. We expect them to come to us, and they do not know we exist. This expectation seems to affirm those age-old stereotypical ideas that younger generations are lazy or entitled. This mentality prevents the Church from recognizing

¹ Micah 6:8 (NIV).

the depth of desire on the part of young adults to engage spiritually and make a positive difference in their communities and the world. How can we develop and tap into this desire? We can equip emerging adults with the tools to be both self-reflective and outwardly empowered with the tool of compassion. In doing so, we open them up to a world rooted in love, purpose, conversation, and connection.

Emerging adults are primed developmentally to make meaning, and this is a space where the Church has a unique purpose. Persons in this age-range are discerning vocation, seeking to be both independent and engaged in deep relationships, all while coming to a foundational understanding of themselves. The development and influence of faith at this stage of life can be crucial to their identities. Working through *The Compassion Practice* allows space for emerging adults to heal past wounds and develop new life-affirming patterns. This can be seen in the second half of this paper through the process of utilizing *Cultivating Radical Compassion* with college students in Michigan. Initially, this paper will clarify who this category of emerging adults is, what makes them unique, and why this is a worthy task to undertake.

Chapter One: Why Compassion, Why Now?

Serving in ministry with young adults has opened my eyes to the variety of human experience encompassed within this category of people. Although the term “young-adults” serves as a generic label for persons ages 18-35, my context for the last five years has been specifically focused on college students ranging in age from 17- 25. Currently, I am in my fifth year serving as the Pastor/Director for the Wesley Foundation at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Michigan. Campus ministry is a multi-faceted experience that connects the Church with persons who are often just beginning to figure out who they are, having just left home for the first time. Located in one of the more economically challenged counties in Michigan, Ferris State is not the average liberal arts university, as it focuses largely on vocational training, business, and medical service degrees. Ferris does not support the typical liberal arts university atmosphere and does not feature strong music or arts programs. In fact, religion, philosophy, sociology and other courses in the social sciences are quite limited. The vision of Ferris State University includes embracing students who may not have been ready socially or equipped academically to engage college courses by offering added direction and assistance. With this focus on a more practical undergraduate experience, Ferris graduates are highly likely to have job offers when they graduate.

The social atmosphere at Ferris is comprised of the usual student organizations: Greek Life, multicultural student groups, academic clubs, and a small number of religious groups. Though the Ferris student body in Big Rapids boasts 9,553 students, only approximately 3,300 are actually living on campus. Student’s spiritual lives are not a matter of importance within the academic structure of the university. Often being a religious organization limits Wesley’s ability to be present with students on campus grounds or in campus facilities. The Wesley Foundation is

the most progressive Christian ministry on campus, meaning that it is inclusive of all persons. For example, our group has been intentional in reaching out to Muslim students, offering space for their prayer time when the university would not do so. We hope to strengthen our relationships and outreach to persons in the minority within the student body, such as African American students, the International students, and the LGBTQ+ community. Because of who we are as a ministry, we attract a spiritually diverse group of students. While a few of them come from strong Christian backgrounds, the majority are students who have either been hurt by the Church, left the Church, or have never really sought an understanding of their spiritual lives.

Our building is located directly across the street from campus and serves most often as a safe space for students to study, rest, eat, and find community. We are also the home of the student food pantry, which offers food twice a month for any student and persons living in their household. Our philosophy for ministry is simple: nurture and love people as they are, engage them in service opportunities that actually make a difference, and watch as they begin to open up and engage spiritually. As a Christian organization, we root all of this in our understanding of God as the Source of Love who knows us deeply, connects us universally, challenges us to be people of compassion, and gives us purpose. Most often, we have no idea where people are spiritually when they enter the doors. This does not matter, as we genuinely recognize our role to be one of hospitality, fostering an environment for spiritual growth and discernment. We need not define that path for anyone. This environment and these students have shaped in me a real understanding that young adults are not lazy and entitled, instead they are most often persons who are searching for vocation, purpose, and meaning. Unfortunately, these are things that cannot be taught in the classroom or learned by listening to lectures; they must be lived.

In the last five years of ministry, I have been surprised by the rising levels of anxiety and depression that seem to run rampant within persons this age. Three times, thus far, I have been the person to intervene when a student was ready to take their own life. I have taken students to inpatient mental healthcare facilities, connected them to counselors, and, most often, listened and prayed with students who felt they had no value, were never going to succeed, and had no one in their families to whom they could turn. The pressure of the world is real. When combined with the increase in gun violence, prejudice, and fear of the “other,” it is easy to understand why young adults, beginning the journey of defining who they are, get overwhelmed to a point of despair.

I believe all of this is why I have been so moved by my interaction with Frank Rogers’ *Compassion Practice*. I discovered this practice in my first semester of Doctor of Ministry work, and it has influenced my life profoundly since. In his book, *Compassion in Practice: The Way of Jesus*, Rogers explains that churches are really meant to be “spiritual paths of transformative love. They are called to be schools of compassion.”² Unfortunately, the loudest voices of the Christian Church in the United States are often those marked by judgment, exclusivity, and fear, which are traits far different than those exemplified by Jesus. *The Compassion Practice* can help us reclaim the mission of compassion both individually and as influential organizations within communities. While religious convictions may serve as motivators or even guardrails for our personal spiritual journeys, these too can become clouded with voices of self-judgment or doubt. This negativity prevents us from recognizing the presence of the Sacred. Compassion really is the key to changing the world; for me, the gift came in recognizing that other people believe the same. *The Compassion Practice* grounds us in our best selves by allowing space for both self-

² Frank Rogers, *Compassion in Practice* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2016), 10.

compassion and by helping discern the process for offering compassion to even the most difficult persons in our lives. It is comprised of four main movements: Catching Your Breath, Taking Your PULSE, Taking the Other's PULSE, and Deciding What to Do.³ After a discussion of exactly who emerging adults actually are, this paper will examine how college students have engaged the practice utilizing the *Cultivating Radical Compassion* curriculum.

³ See pg. 46 for greater explanation of these four movements.

Chapter Two: What is an Emerging Adult?

The most well-known study in the psychological world regarding young adults was completed by psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett in 2005. Arnett interviewed three hundred people living in their third decade of life, defined as between the ages of 18-29. Upon completion of his research, he “proposed a new period of life-span development called ‘emerging adulthood.’”⁴ Emerging adulthood is defined as the span of time after adolescence through the time of taking on responsibilities of adulthood, such as a stable job, marriage, and parenthood. This category of persons is not simply a new label for young adults; Arnett concludes that emerging adulthood is a new phenomenon brought about by social and cultural changes in the past few decades in the United States. This is a change from the stages of development defined by German-American psychologist Erik Erikson in the 1950s, which marked identity formation within adolescence.⁵ Erikson’s theory of development is comprised of eight stages. A move from one stage to the next involves a challenge, which then leads to a different aspect of development building on the previous stages. The process of attaining adulthood is a matter of “normative” steps, “develop identity, find work, and then marry.”⁶ While this may have been the norm years ago, in recent years, the timing of these events has changed. Arnett explains that Erikson’s theory did include commentary on “prolonged adolescence” though he emphasizes that “decades later

⁴ Christopher Munsey, “Emerging Adults: The In-between Age,” *Monitor on Psychology* 37, no. 6 (June 2006): 68.

⁵ Kendra Cherry, “Intimacy vs. Isolation: Psychosocial Stage 6,” *Verywellmind* (September 2018): <https://www.verywellmind.com/intimacy-versus-isolation-2795739>. Intimacy versus isolation is the sixth stage of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. This stage takes place during young adulthood between the ages of approximately 19 and 40. During this period, the major conflict centers on forming intimate, loving relationships with other people.

⁶ Daniel Lapsley and Sam Hardy, “Positive Development During Emerging Adulthood: Identity Formation and Moral Development,” in *Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood*, eds. Laura Padilla Walker and Larry Nelson (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 19.

this observation applies to many more young people than when he first wrote.”⁷ This perceived lengthening of the transition from adolescence into adulthood was the impetus for Arnett’s study.

Within the emerging adults he studied, Arnett found five major points of commonality: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and age of possibilities.

Identity exploration

Arnett recognizes that more than any other period in life, the years of emerging adulthood offer the most opportunity for identity exploration. Seeking clarification about questions, such as “Who am I?” and “What do I want out of life?” lead emerging adults down new paths filled with learning and discovery.⁸ Much of this exploration coincides with life transitions, as young people gain independence and leave home for the first time. Throughout the process of his interviews, Arnett recognized two areas that seem to be most important for emerging adults in relation to identity exploration: love and work. He explains that “explorations in love in emerging adulthood tend to involve a deeper level of intimacy.”⁹ Through both the success and failure in building these relationships, emerging adults begin to clarify their identities in relation to others, as well as gaining clarity surrounding issues of sexuality and social identity. This period can be marked by an urgency to develop and invest in long-term, even life-long, partnerships with both romantic partners and friends. With regard to work, these years are spent recognizing and developing skills and abilities, while at the same time discerning a vocation that holds meaning and opportunity.

⁷ Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties* (New York, NY: Oxford University Publishing, 2015), 10.

⁸ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road*, 9.

⁹ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road*, 10.

Instability

The minute young people graduate from high school, they are asked the often-dreaded question, “What are you going to do with your life?” The idea that emerging adults should have plans at the age of 18 that they follow through on into adulthood seems a bit absurd. For many, this question also brings forth immeasurable pressure and anxiety. The factors that undergird this instability are complicated. For some, college is the natural or expected route following high school. For others, college seems a remote option. For young people living in poverty, for many minority populations, and for those raised in high-crime or extremely rural conditions, the avenues for stability, access to education, and financial opportunity may be very limited. In addition, Arnett explains that while emerging adults are exploring and defining who they are, these plans are “subject to numerous revisions during the emerging adult years.”¹⁰ The beauty is that “with each revision something new is learned about themselves leading them to take a step toward clarifying the kind of future they want.”¹¹ Pressure to claim a specific direction in the midst of undecidedness, or recognizing the initial direction as misguided can be a fear-filled, anxious time. Trends in the job market and national economic security are also factors that contribute to the present and future stability sought at this stage in development.

Self-focus

Arnett explains that unlike children, adolescents, and adults who have people in their lives to help guide expectations, emerging adults may be the most autonomous of all in some senses. He makes clear that being self-focused at this time in life is normal, explaining that “by focusing on themselves, emerging adults develop skills at daily living, gain a better

¹⁰ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road*, 11.

¹¹ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road*, 12.

understanding of who they are and what they want from life, and begin to build a foundation for their adult lives.”¹² For many, this can be an exciting time filled with adventure. For others, who do not have access to those life-lines of financial security or parental/family support, focusing on self-growth and understanding is not always a positive experience. For emerging adults who marry young, start a family young, or are in the role of provider for family members, self-focus may not be such a legitimate factor.

Feeling in-between

When asked how they define themselves, the emerging adults with whom Arnett worked responded that they “do not see themselves as adolescents, but many do not see themselves entirely as adults.”¹³ He noticed three common criteria that would signal the transition into adulthood: “accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent.”¹⁴ Interestingly, these three criteria are transitional and not happening all at once. Again, the research cannot generalize that when these three criteria are met, an emerging adult has successfully transitioned into adulthood. For many, this feeling of being in-between is long-lasting, as careers begin and jobs change. In the U.S. culture, individuals are not staying in one job for their whole working lives as in the past. Often due to downsizing or economic instability, emerging adults find this feeling lasts much longer than it used to.

¹² Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road*, 14.

¹³ Jeffrey Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties,” *American Psychologist* 55, no. 5 (May 2000): 469-480, http://jeffre yarnett.com/articles/ARNETT_Emerging_Adulthood_theory.pdf.

¹⁴ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road*, 15.

Possibilities/optimism

Right alongside the feeling of being in-between comes a multitude of possibilities. Emerging adults may be a reflection of the values and ideals of their parents or loved ones, while at the same time, they are taking independent steps to define themselves apart from those connections. It is important to remember that persons living in various parts of the world experience this stage differently. For the majority, this stage offers them opportunities to choose a new or a different direction of some sort. No longer are they required to attend school; for example, they may find working full-time appealing or necessary. Again, at this stage, intimate and deep relationships are sought out, lending individuals to build and seek new friendships or romantic partners. Ironically, while the number of possibilities enlarges their perspectives, this can be the very thing that provokes anxiety or indecision.

These five commonalities represent basic tenants of this stage of development, but they are experienced differently based on the emerging adult's upbringing, socio-economic status, familial relationships, et cetera. While these differences were highlighted in each of the categories, these varying factors don't negate Arnett's findings completely. Within the last fifty years, things have changed drastically with regard to cultural norms. The average age for marriage has increased significantly. The median age of marriage is now at 29 for men and 27 for women.¹⁵ Young people are not getting married right out of high school; many take time to attend college or join the military, for example. Changing attitudes on premarital sex and the

¹⁵ Jeffrey Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood," in *Noba textbook series: Psychology*, eds. R. Biswas-Diener and E. Diener (Champaign, IL: DEF Publishers, 2019), <http://nobaproject.com/modules/emerging-adulthood>.

availability of contraceptive options have made space for young people to wait longer to marry or to decide not get married at all.

Because of the number of different paths persons take at this stage of life, “Arnett sees the need for greatly expanded societal efforts to help them navigate the transition into careers and family.”¹⁶ He explains that when equipped, emerging adults generally respond positively and make this transition successfully. When offered helpful vocational, educational, even spiritual tools through mentoring, the emerging adult’s journey of meaning-making can be a positive experience. Again, this can be a role of the Church.

This may seem a problematic line of thinking in light of research that continues to show a rise in the number of emerging adults with no connection to a religious tradition. However, this same research shows that “spirituality and religion still remain important to many emerging adults within the United States.”¹⁷ In their essay “Religious Congregations and Communities,” Whitney and King discuss how regular participants in formal religious congregations are broken up into four categories: devoted, regular, sporadic, and disengaged.¹⁸ Emerging adults classified as devoted in this study believe weekly participation in services is meaningful. Both those classified as devoted and as regular agreed that service helped them to come to a greater depth of understanding; however, this does not encompass the majority of emerging adults. There does exist a link between affiliation with a religious tradition, whether formally or informally, and a person’s understanding of purpose and connection with others in one’s community. Thus, an

¹⁶ Christopher Munsey, “Emerging Adults: The In-Between Age,” *Monitor on Psychology* 37, no. 6 (June 2006): <https://www.apa.org/monitor/jun06/emerging.aspx>.

¹⁷ William Whitney and Pamela King, “Religious Congregations and Communities,” in *Emerging Adults’ Religiousness and Spirituality*, eds. Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 133.

¹⁸ Munsey, “Emerging Adults: The In-Between Age,” 137.

inclusive religious environment through which a person can discern beliefs and engage spiritually can definitely provide a healthy foundation for meaning-making and determining self-understanding.

Arnett makes clear when discussing emerging adults' sources of meaning that while religious beliefs are quite diverse, common ground can be found. Christian Smith, Director of National Studies of Youth and Religion at the University of Notre Dame, coined these similarities as "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, a belief system that is defined by these principles:

- A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
- God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
- The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
- God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when needed to resolve a problem.
- Good people go to heaven when they die."¹⁹

These principles define the majority of students with whom I interact, those who are not tightly tied to a specific set of religious principles but do at least ponder the existence of God and have a desire to explore their spirituality in an effort to define their Truth. In fact, the desire to explore spirituality without judgement is often the thing that keeps emerging adults from attending formalized worship services or religious events. Couple that with the conservative religious voice that seems often to be loudest in the media, and emerging adults may shy away from this exploration completely, unless they have the opportunity for open dialogue and learning while also being respected and heard.

¹⁹ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road*, 218.

The spiritual beliefs of emerging adults are often intertwined with their moral values. This ties their spiritual understanding directly into the process of meaning-making. For many emerging adults, this process is very individualistic. Meaning-making is about defining themselves. The idea of systemic morality often is not what emerging adults are focused on; perhaps that comes only after personal values are established. In his book *Lost in Translation: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, Smith notes that among these moral individualists lies the belief that “it is wrong for people to morally judge other people.”²⁰ Smith also points out that the majority of emerging adults are simply not engaged in the idea that they can make a positive impact on the world, whether socially, politically, or economically. Rather, they engage in a kind of blind search to succeed by making themselves happy, which is also a bit of a gray area in definition.

All of this, of course, lends to much misunderstanding and false judgement about emerging adults as a group. Older generations often blame this group for negative trends in society because they assume what emerging adults face today must be the same as the experience of growing up “when I was younger.” This is not a fair assumption and does not help equip emerging adults with the tools they need to find a more multifaceted understanding of the world and its people. Upon the completion of his team’s interviewing, Smith shares that “what we saw and heard is that many emerging adult lives are complex, fraught with difficulty, and often beset with big problems, serious confusions, and misplaced values and devotions.”²¹ While some of this can be explained by societal changes and the lengthening of this developmental stage (persons taking longer to reach that stage of making adulthood type commitments) Smith says

²⁰ Christian Smith, *Lost in Translation: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 23.

²¹ Smith, *Lost in Translation: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, 229.

“most emerging adults live this crucial decade of life surrounded mostly by their peers—who have no more experience, insight, wisdom, perspective, or balance than they do.”²² The implications of this secluded, peer-focused environment can be a limiting of emerging adults’ abilities to engage that which lies outside of this realm. Often during these years, exposure to the things of the world are less of a priority than engaging socially or academically. In college, for example most emerging adults actually disengage from their home environments and engage in this type of insulated self-definition for the first time. While generally a time in life that is exciting, this phase can be disadvantageous and offer false sense of how to engage the world of adulthood.

One way to assist emerging adults in this time of self-discovery is to surround them with non-peer lifelines (mentors, advisors, elders). When appropriate and intentional, these relationships can help to equip them with guidance and helpful tools for their life toolbox. Building relationships with persons outside of the immediate student environment, for example, can expand perspectives, challenge their parental-driven belief systems, and allow for doubt or questioning while remaining in a safe space. While emerging adults certainly seek elements of individual discernment and place a large focus on understanding themselves, Smith concludes that “for better or worse, people and cultures recurrently find themselves drawn to answers that reflect horizons that are higher, bigger, more transcendent, or more meaningful than the prosaic, immanent, natural, and mundane world.”²³ Thus, many emerging adults while searching for significance are also discerning what it is that gives their life value and meaning. This is a direct connection to the realm of spiritual growth and nurture that can take place within a religious

²² Smith, *Lost in Translation: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, 234.

²³ Smith, *Lost in Translation: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, 237.

community. It is empowering for both the emerging adult and the faith community when emerging adults are given the tools to recognize and engage their spiritual gifts. It is crucial to engage the spiritual elements of identity along with the academic and vocational pursuit that takes place during these years.

Arnett also recognizes the individualistic nature of persons in this stage but is quick to point out that “most of them balance their individualism with a collectivistic concern for others in their moral thinking.”²⁴ This line of thinking is based on answers he received when asking emerging adults what they hoped to be remembered for at the end of their life. Many of those questioned had immediate answers, which led him to believe that they had thought about this previously. From this, Arnett concluded that though individualism is most definitely present throughout emerging adulthood, they also have a desire to care for and do good for others. He recognizes emerging adults are searching for meaning, searching for avenues toward happiness, all in the midst of the desire to do good, to be good enough, and to define truth. These desires are partnered with social influences staking their claim in this process of identity formation. Often these influences are represented by peer-relationships that boldly claim to know the best avenues to meaning. Today, these pressures encourage a robust virtual life, such as increased activity on social media, internet dating, and social connection via video games. When an emerging adult relies solely on the influence of peers and the whims of the social system, self-definition and meaning-making can also take the form of such things as a great desire for wealth or material goods, even experimenting with drugs and alcohol. In addition, as mentioned previously, changes in cultural understandings of premarital sex and access to contraceptives allow for increased sexual exploration as these emerging adults seek to engage in intimate relationships. In

²⁴ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road*, 237.

the midst of all of this, having the ability to understand and recognize their emotions, their abilities to stay grounded and connected to others can be of great benefit.

For many (definitely not all) emerging adults, the bulk of this process occurs while they are in college. While the paths to a college degree are as varied as the people themselves personal growth and self-discovery clearly are markers of a satisfactory undergraduate experience. Focusing inwardly on self-identity is only one dimension of this time of life; how an emerging adult will live this out in the world is another. This can be understood in terms of their abilities to construct narrative identities. One helpful definition for narrative identity is “an evolving life story of the self that brings order and sensibility to one’s lived experience, including the integration of self-distinctiveness with relational commitments.”²⁵ This narrative brings together the past experiences, people, and events that the emerging adult has had and connects them with their hopes and dreams for the future in such a way that their life has a depth of meaning. Clearly, none of this happens in a vacuum; rather the search for purpose, self-understanding and meaning, vocation, love, and desire for a successful future are all going on simultaneously.

Another interesting aspect of emerging adulthood that plays into the larger discussion on meaning is this desire for vocation rather than simply employment. In his book *Let Your Life Speak*, Parker Palmer explains that vocation “does not come from willfulness. It comes from listening.” To discern vocation, he says, “I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity.”²⁶ Arnett likens this to that “aha! moment when one knows they have found their

²⁵ Lapsley and Hardy, “Positive Development During Emerging Adulthood: Identity Formation and Moral Development,” 23.

²⁶ Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

true calling.”²⁷ This understanding of vocation ties into the use of the Enneagram as a starting point for understanding self as will be examined in the *Cultivating Radical Compassion* curriculum later.²⁸ For now, it is important to recognize that as emerging adults search for and make meaning, discovering or uncovering vocation is often one motivator. For Palmer, this means searching deep within the self and allowing inner dialogue to answer the questions, “Who am I? What is my nature?”²⁹ Palmer connects these questions to the development of a spiritual life. Arnett’s conclusions surrounding vocation state that emerging adults “aspire to find a job that will be an expression of their identity, a job that will make them a better person,” that “86 percent of emerging adults agreed that it is important to have a career that does some good in the world.”³⁰ More than ever, emerging adults are searching for that which connects their self with their purpose.

Defining emerging adulthood as an additional stage of development allows for a greater length of time before their adult responsibilities kick in, which also allows for a greater exploration of their vocations. Arnett found that according to those he studied, “the ideal [vocation] is identity-based work, a job that you believe makes the most of your talents and interests and that you look forward to doing each day.”³¹ The road to achieving this can take on many forms. Spiritually speaking, Palmer explains that this “inner work, though it is deeply personal, is not necessarily a private matter: inner work can be helped along in community.”³²

²⁷ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road*, 145.

²⁸ See pg. 31.

²⁹ Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 15. Later in the book, he shares his understanding of identity and vocation by using the metaphor of seasons. This metaphor allows for continual transformation of self and roots us in the universality of connection with humanity and ecology (pp. 96-109).

³⁰ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road*, 169.

³¹ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road*, 173.

³² Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road*, 92.

For the emerging adults, affirmation and connection in community are necessary pieces to their abilities to grasp with confidence their true identities. This community is no willy-nilly gathering of persons; rather, it is a group of persons who allow them to search and journey within themselves while listening, challenging, and encouraging in a non-judgmental, safe, and confidential place. This place could be the Church, and *The Compassion Practice* is a means by which this process can be engaged.

Unfortunately, the old adage of “if we build it, they will come” simply does not hold up any longer for the Church. Emerging adults are surrounded by a barrage of voices competing for priority. The Church cannot expect them to be grounded or even aware of the reality that all of humanity is on this journey together, or that universal truths of compassion and love are available and helpful guardrails on the road to self-definition. Church leaders must offer avenues through which these ideals can be engaged. By holding fast to “the way things have always been done,” the Church assumes that emerging adults are going to show up seeking answers, guidance, and a strong foundation. Unfortunately, this is not happening. This is not a matter of debate about contemporary or traditional styles of worship, location or design of buildings and worship spaces, or even theology or polity debates. All of this seems to only distract us from what the Church really needs to do: show up, listen, share and mentor while validating the humanity, goodness and potential that inhabit emerging adults.

Chapter Three: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood

The ever-changing nature of this period of time in young people's lives can also have a dark side. Statistics show that "in a given year, over 40 percent of U.S. 18 to 29-year-olds meet criteria for psychiatric disorder, a higher rate than for any other adult age group. The most common disorders are anxiety (22.3%), substance use (22.0%), and mood disorders (22.0%)."³³ As explained above, this time of life offers both opportunities for growth and failure. As emerging adults live into their freedoms, a sense of added pressure to succeed may arise. This pressure can turn into paralyzing anxiety. In addition, in the midst of choosing their paths in life, emerging adults frequently feel hopeless about the future. Often for college students, this can lead to isolation or deep feelings of inadequacy. The number of college students dealing with the ill-effects of anxiety and depression is on the rise. Arnett describes this by pointing out a "paradox of mental health during the emerging adult years: overall, self-esteem and life satisfaction are high, but rates of depression and anxiety are high too."³⁴ Smith and Snell point out in *Souls in Transition: The Religious Lives of Emerging Adults in America* that:

By age 18 to 23, many emerging adults have endured some of their own or others' alcoholism, drug addictions, sexual exploitations, divorces, unpleasant arrests, relational betrayals, frightening accidents, academic failures, job disappointments, parental abandonment, racism, deaths of friends, and more. Many have suffered a variety of other consequences of their various risky behaviors and self-described poor choices. Many are stinging with the hurts of living problemated lives in what seems a broken world and are still working on recovering.³⁵

³³ Jesse Viner and Jennifer Tanner, "Psychiatric Disorders in Emerging Adulthood," Yellowbrick Emerging Adult Treatment Center, accessed November 14, 2018, <https://www.yellowbrickprogram.com/Papers-By-Yellowbrick/psychiatric-disorders-emerging-adult.html>.

³⁴ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road*, 276.

³⁵ Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 37.

Emerging adults often have great fear of failure within their hearts and minds, whether they are attending college or not. They repeatedly ask “What am I doing here, and what if I have made the wrong choices? Underneath these questions lies a genuine fear that the choices made will lead to some form of disappointment from the people they care about the most, or that they will not “measure up” or “be enough” to make those adult commitments in the future. Some are concerned for the opposite reasons, wanting to be nothing like their parents or family systems. Others are yearning to be agents of change in broken systems that have impacted their lives adversely. The co-pilot of rising anxiety only adds to the emerging adult’s awareness that this is the time to figure things out, to make meaning, and define their contribution to the world. Of course, this process continues into adulthood, but emerging adults have a pervasive sense that the time is now to figure things out.

Much of this can be explained by taking a moment to understand a bit of the psychological and cognitive development happening within the years of emerging adulthood. In an article entitled *Emerging Structures of Adult Thought*, Gisela Labouvie-Vief states that “emerging adults have difficulty maintaining balanced cognitive-emotional representations, especially if emotions are strongly activated, as when issues of security and survival are activated.”³⁶ In life, emerging adults, as Arnett pointed out, have this great feeling of “in-between,” which also marks a time in life that can seem a bit like an emotional rollercoaster.³⁷ Failure is a part of figuring out the path, yet often it is the thing most feared. In the midst of growth in the behavioral and relational development, their emotional health also plays a large

³⁶ Gisela Labouvie-Vief, “Emerging Structures of Adult Thought,” in *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, eds. Jeffrey Arnett and Jennifer Tanner (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2006), 79.

³⁷ Defined on pg. 8 of this paper.

part in how they interact with their environments. Labouvie-Vief underscores this by recognizing that “emerging adults are still easily swayed by their emotions to distort their thinking in self-serving and self-protective ways.”³⁸ While they are aware of these emotional movements, rarely do they easily understand them, and they often ignore them altogether.

The mental growth within emerging adulthood is not better or worse than any other time of development, but it is “more diverse.” This diversity allows for many paths of mental growth which can be “attributed to the lack of institutional structure and social support during this age period.” Thus far, researchers have repeatedly concluded that the older generation can play a beneficial (or not) role in the developmental and meaning-making journeys of emerging adults. The questions continue to be posed: “Does this generation of mentors exist? Can we provide healthy models of openness and disciplined change? Are we able to teach emerging adults in ways that are generative?”³⁹

The main motivating factors in the creation of this curriculum are identified in these previous paragraphs. Addressing levels of anxiety by journeying alongside emerging adults as they form meaning and discern truth is a part of my call as a pastor. While this might be expected in the realm of pastoral care, however, rare are pastors who have (or take) the opportunity to recognize importance of development occurring within emerging adults. More often, those pastors are devising ways for religion to be hip and attractive in advertising or programming to try and get them to show up. In working through the curriculum with college students, I have also recognized the power of teaching emerging adults how to live into a life marked by

³⁸ LabouvieVief, “Emerging Structures of Adult Thought,” 79.

³⁹ LabouvieVief, “Emerging Structures of Adult Thought,” 80.

compassion. If as proposed above, younger generations are mentored or led into systems of knowledge by prior generations, then “education forms the very mechanism by which individuals are initiated into the storehouse of cultural knowledge.”⁴⁰ Could this be the Church’s mission?

⁴⁰ Labouvie-Vief, “Emerging Structures of Adult Thought,” 80.

Chapter Four: Pedagogy and Methodology

Pedagogy: Teaching emerging adults

Many studies exist about how best to teach children and adolescents, but the category of emerging adults is so diverse that few studies exist that specifically relate to best practices for teaching persons in the 18-29 year range. One of the best resources on the subject is called *A Philosophy for Teaching and Learning in Emerging Adulthood* by Sara M. Flowers, M.S., C.A.S. Flowers explains that teaching emerging adults is referred to as “ephebago” and that in this developmental stage, “students need environments that offer relevance, revelation, responsibility, and relationships.”⁴¹ She also explains that effective teaching for emerging adults “would be a mix of introducing experiences and scaffolding learning on prior life experiences and observations. Though a young person’s experiences are limited, they are no less pertinent in learning.”⁴² This is a call to assist emerging adults in meaning-making, based on their experiences, not solely the wisdom from older generations.

Into this realm falls an interesting discussion about the power and necessity of imagination. In her book *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in their Search for Meaning*, Sharon D. Parks asserts that imagination is a crucial player in “understanding the formation of meaning, purpose, and faith.”⁴³ She breaks it down into three specific dimensions:

⁴¹ Sara M. Flowers, “A Philosophy for Teaching and Learning in Emerging Adulthood,” *New Horizons for Learning* 11, no 1 (Spring 2014).

⁴² Flowers, “A Philosophy for Teaching and Learning in Emerging Adulthood,” 5.

⁴³ Sharon D. Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 14, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=697649>.

First, imagination is a process through which our most profound learning occurs, the power by which our worldview can be recast, the power by which we move from faith to faith.

Second, embedded in the process of imagination is the power to give form to our knowing— the power of naming— the content of feeling and thought.

Third, imagination is an act of creativity that matters because it manifests as embodied action in the world.⁴⁴

If building strong emerging adult leaders is a desired outcome of the *Cultivating Radical Compassion* curriculum, Church leaders using it must understand both the environment that needs to be created as well as this process of meaning-making within the imagination. Offering space for students to remember past experiences, reflect on current experiences, and imagine a future is critical. The goal is growth in understanding, recognition of that which can be changed or adapted, and tools to reroute unhealthy processing habits. This may be defined as a form of adaptive leadership development. Adaptive leadership allows persons to “face their toughest challenges, that is, leadership helps people move from the current pattern of organization through the swamp of the unknown to a more adequate pattern.”⁴⁵ This is one of the underlying goals of *The Compassion Practice* and this curriculum. Not only do participants experience a trusted, mentoring relationship with the persons in the class, but in working through the steps, they also learn the tools to reframe destructive patterns.

Quite similar to the steps in *The Compassion Practice*, the work of James Loder and John Paul Lederach offers some understanding into the process of the imagination. They have identified “five critical elements in the process of imagination as they bear on human development, learning, and meaning-making.”⁴⁶ These moments within the “act of imagination”

⁴⁴ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 137-139.

⁴⁵ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 141.

⁴⁶ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 143.

coincide with the process outlined in *The Compassion Practice*. The five elements are conscious conflict, pause, image or insight, repatterning, and interpretation.

Conscious conflict

This first element is the recognition that often conflict spurs transformation. Loder and Lederach define this as “the moment when something doesn’t seem to fit our previous experience and the meanings we have made, and we are set at odds with our usual perceptions of things.”⁴⁷ They also point out that effective leadership/teaching seeks ways to create this kind of dissonance, which can lead to personal growth. Of course, some difficult consequences also can occur when they begin these journeys of transformation. It can lead to feelings of doubt, isolation, and even deep anxiety. The tension lies in both confronting the transformation but also allowing it to interact with established patterns. Loder and Lederach say “the emerging adult is particularly vulnerable to escaping the conflict either in false security of a premature resolution or in facing the dichotomy of the conflict as stark and absolute.”⁴⁸ *The Compassion Practice* can be transformative right at this moment of recognizing this dissonance. It challenges persons not to brush over or neglect these moments but to dissect them, engage them, and learn from them. This is a meaning-making process.

Pause

The second element is the recognition that taking a break, walking away, or setting the problem aside for a while can be helpful to development. In some sense, this can be seen as taking a “time-out” to regather and devise a solution. Loder and Lederach believe that “contemplative

⁴⁷ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 144.

⁴⁸ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 145.

pause is integral to the intellectual life, and to the formation of trustworthy meaning— the life of faith.”⁴⁹ Within the context of *The Compassion Practice*, taking a pause or “catching our breath” is a necessary first step for compassionate listening. Frank Rogers would then offer the next step of “taking the U-turn,” which allows time for examination and understanding to occur.

Image (Insight)

The third element is the process by which an image (or insight) emerges that “simplifies and unifies the conflict that seemed to be unresolvable.”⁵⁰ This insight leads to a new understanding or epiphany and brings the conflict into a beneficial place. In terms of *The Compassion Practice*, this step coincides with both taking your PULSE, and perhaps taking the PULSE of the other.⁵¹ This process allows for a deeper understanding of the tension that exists, and simplification of what often may seem like an unsolvable problem by asking what lies underneath the reaction.

Repatterning

The fourth element comes from the prompting of the image or insight. Loder and Lederach explain that “from the point of the insight, there is a rippling effect that recomposes the former pattern into a new way of seeing the whole.”⁵² By examining or taking the PULSE of the situation, *The Compassion Practice* allows for understanding both inwardly and outwardly, and then allows for a remembering of identity in connection with the Sacred, which opens up the opportunity for healing compassion.

Interpretation

⁴⁹ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 148.

⁵⁰ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 150.

⁵¹ See Appendices C and E.

⁵² Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 155.

The fifth and final element is the process by which the new pattern is put into place and tested. In Compassion Practice terms we would call this, “discerning a compassionate action.” After having gone through this process, from taking the pause, understanding and then repatterning we can then recognize what new thing may come from the process. This new thing is birthed from a grounded place rather than being a knee-jerk reaction to emotions.

For the college student, this process may occur repeatedly as identity is sorted out and meaning is made. The framework of an emerging adult’s upbringing and experience serves as the starting point for this transformational learning. Teaching in this environment involves equipping young people with the skills necessary to self-reflect and connect with others in appropriate, life-giving ways. This is one of the goals of the curriculum.

Methodology

The primary source of information for this project was obtained via case study. Participants in this project were emerging adults. The main focus group was comprised of college students from four college campuses in Michigan: Ferris State University, Central Michigan University, Michigan State University, and Western Michigan University. My colleagues in campus ministry agreed to use this curriculum for intentional leadership development of both their ministry teams and student interns. As these campuses are all unique, this provided feedback from diverse perspectives. To be clear however, the curriculum has not been used with emerging adults outside of the college experience.

The curriculum is comprised of six sessions and an initial retreat. Each session had a similar structure: Opening, Learning, Practice, and Closing. Within each session, students experienced and learned a form of spiritual discipline, reviewed the last session and integrated one new component of *The Compassion Practice*, had an integrative experience with the new

component, and closed in prayer. Throughout each part of the session, students were invited to be active participants by answering questions and reflecting on their own experiences.

Students participated in this study as a small group. Students committed to all sessions, and after the first session, groups were closed to new participants. This allowed for the group to build trust with one another. The leaders facilitating the practice were credentialed clergy, though the curriculum has been designed to be led by non-clergy as well. Facilitating it this way allowed for participants to engage with someone they knew and trusted. This afforded a sense of trust that the sessions would be taught with integrity. This was the facilitator's initial exposure to *The Compassion Practice*, which offered relevant feedback to modify the curriculum to its best potential. To assist with context and for reference, they were equipped with copies of *Compassion in Practice* and *The Road Back to You*.

The only official data that was collected aside from observation and participant reflection and evaluation was the use of The Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7). Students were only asked to share what they were comfortable in sharing. Conversations stayed confidential, and anything written was kept in locked offices. "The GAD-7 questionnaire is a seven-item, self-report anxiety questionnaire designed to assess the patient's health status during the previous 2 weeks."⁵³ The GAD-7 tool is available to the public and is easy to fill out and read. It allowed for an initial understanding of the level of anxiety active within each participant.⁵⁴ It also helped tailor the practice to the participant's current experience with anxiety. For these study participants in particular, the GAD-7 worked well as students met every other week, and this

⁵³ Nerys Williams, "The GAD-7 questionnaire," in *Occupational Medicine* 64, no. 3 (April 2014): 22, <https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqt161>.

⁵⁴ The GAD-7 was developed by Drs. Robert L. Spitzer, Janet B.W. Williams, Kurt Kroenke, and colleagues, with an educational grant from Pfizer Inc.

assessment covers a two-week span of time. Participants were invited to fill out an evaluation questionnaire at the completion of the final session. Their responses served as an overall assessment of the experience, the curriculum's effectiveness, and of the insight from the ongoing work of the curriculum in the lives of the participants. This data will be used in future revisions of the curriculum. All paperwork and notes kept throughout the duration of the class will be destroyed upon the completion of the project.

Chapter Five: Curriculum Development

My initial encounter with *The Compassion Practice* affected me profoundly. I was introduced to the practice and found it offered me an avenue to peace. As a pastor (and a 2 on the Enneagram), I struggle, as do many, with feelings of inadequacy and can base too much of my self-worth on what I am doing professionally rather than staying grounded in my best-self, which, for me, coincides with the Image of God in me. This struggle has fueled a dangerous workaholic attitude, which limits my ability to experience the joy of ministry. As Henri Nouwen said and is quoted in *The Sacred Enneagram*, “we all find ourselves bouncing around three very human lies that we believe about our identity: I am what I have, I am what I do, and I am what other people say about me.”⁵⁵ I have always been able to share compassion with others, but this practice taught me a process to offer it to myself. I have realized that only by allowing for self-compassion can we be healed and open ourselves up to a real sense of understanding and caring for another. While I am still a work in progress, I quickly recognized the transformative power this practice could have in the lives of the students I serve.

The leader guide in the back of *Compassion in Practice* is most effective when utilized within a group of persons who have read the book and are willing to engage in conversation about their experience. While this would be effective in most places, I felt the practice could be made more accessible to emerging adults by adding in experiential elements and opportunities that offer meaningful tools for self-understanding and spiritual growth. This curriculum can also be accessible for persons who have not read the book, which is helpful in the context of college students who already have many books to read. Writing the curriculum this way allows it to

⁵⁵ Christopher Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 20.

reach emerging adults who are often running in multiple directions at once. Below are some specific elements that are included in the curriculum, why they are included, and the goals associated with their use.

Enneagram

The ancient personality type system Enneagram has become increasingly popular since the publication of Ian Cron and Suzanne Stabile's book, *The Road Back to You*. It offers an easy-to-read, easy-to-understand entrance to the Enneagram system. Richard Rohr, in his book *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*, explains that the Enneagram is a tool "that is forcing many of us to a brutal and converting honesty about good and evil and the ways that we hide from ourselves and therefore hide from God."⁵⁶ This tool is multifaceted and offers avenues to understand self and false-self and the positive and negative ways people hide themselves to function in society. In a real sense, the Enneagram holds up a mirror through which participants can see the "self" uninhibited, freed up from that which they use to cover the image of God within them. In *Cultivating Radical Compassion*, these layers are referred to as masks, those behaviors, attitudes, ambitions, and the like, that prevent people from showing vulnerability. Unfortunately, once put into place, these masks are not always beneficial. The ways people coped as children, for example, are not always beneficial for them as they age.

Versions of the Enneagram are numerous and have been around for thousands of years. Some version of it exists as a part of nearly every belief system: Judaism, Christianity, Sufism, and Buddhism. While Enneagram has roots in mathematics (Pythagoras) and mysticism (Poncius), the modern form did not arrive until the early 1900s when "an Eastern Orthodox

⁵⁶ Richard Rohr, *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), xvi.

man, G.I. Gurdjieff, introduced it in the Western world.”⁵⁷ Since that time, it has been studied, passed on through generations of curious learners, tweaked, hidden, and developed into the process it is today. Through the ages, users have promoted a common understanding that, “the Enneagram can help us to purify our self-perception, to become unsparingly honest toward ourselves, and to discern better and better when we are hearing only our own inner voices and impressions and are prisoners of our prejudices – and when we are capable of being open to what is new.”⁵⁸ The gift of discovering and the tools for understanding the self offer emerging adults some foundational strength. Awareness of masks, stress points, and heart points allow for movement in positive directions and an opportunity to re-route themselves when necessary. These tools are beneficial at any age, but offering this knowledge to emerging adults can be profound, especially in light of the current national climate.

The easiest access to the Enneagram comes best through use of the EnneaApp. Downloaded onto a smartphone or taken online, this app clearly and effectively offers basic information about each type, heart and stress points, wings, and triads. The app even indicates which famous people may occupy the same Enneagram number. The EnneaApp was developed in 2013 as an accessible entryway to the Enneagram for all people. Developers Elan BenAmi and Lori Ohlson have focused their work “around sharing the wisdom of this system with as many people as possible, and supporting fellow travelers on their Enneagram paths.”⁵⁹ The app offers excellent access to this in-depth, soul-revealing opportunity at the literal fingertips of emerging adults, who have their smartphones tethered to them most of the time anyway. The app allows students a gateway to self-understanding, which prepares them for *The Compassion Practice* by

⁵⁷ Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram*, 44.

⁵⁸ Rohr, *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*, 21.

⁵⁹ “EnneaApp,” Hearthstone Counseling LLC (2013), www.eneaapp.com.

turning their eyes inward and beginning the process of self-discovery. In addition to Cron and Stabile's book, *The Road Back to You*, they have created a podcast that has been instrumental in my understanding of the different Enneagram types. Each week, they offer a new episode focusing on one or two of the types by allowing persons with these types to share their stories. Often, the presenters are a couple with two divergent types, and they share and discuss how their Enneagram numbers play into their relationship, for better or worse. This podcast can be easily accessed online or downloaded onto a smartphone.⁶⁰ Because curiosity was peaked about the Enneagram and in an effort to understand themselves, most participants in *Cultivating Radical Compassion* have listened to at least one episode. Participants are intrigued by what they have learned about themselves and one another via the Enneagram. By no means does this overview offer an exhaustive understanding of the Enneagram because that would require many more pages. However, Appendix A provides an overview of the nine Enneagram types.

While the Enneagram offers insight into a person's personality and wiring, the types can also be difficult to take in, as they also point out some difficult truths. By revealing these truths, participants can integrate and come to understand these pieces of themselves. One way they can best accomplish this integration is by taking part in spiritual disciplines. Heurtz focuses on this idea in *The Sacred Enneagram* by saying "pairing the Enneagram with contemplative spiritual practice helps us make this authentic passage."⁶¹

Spiritual practices

"The more we engage in spiritual practices,

⁶⁰ Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile. *The Road Back to You* (podcast). <https://www.theroadbacktoyou.com/podcast>, 2017.

⁶¹ Heurtz, *The Sacred Enneagram*, 31.

the more control we gain over our body, mind, and fate.”⁶²

During each lesson in *Cultivating Radical Compassion*, participants are invited into a time of reflection, learning, and discussion based on a specific spiritual/contemplative practice. When utilizing this curriculum to reduce anxiety, manage stress, and offer college students skills to benefit their lives, the learning of spiritual practices is crucial. In their book, *How God Changes Your Brain*, Andrew Newburg and Mark Waldman explain how God exists and impacts the different parts of people’s brains as a “combination of ideas, images, feelings, sensations, and self/other relationships.”⁶³ Knowing God is not all that can have a positive impact on participants. By integrating spiritual practice with what they learn about God, they actually benefit neurologically. The benefits are clear in proving that “by altering the neurochemistry of the brain, spiritual practices bestow a sense of peace, happiness, and security, while decreasing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress.”⁶⁴ Even more important is the understanding that “in terms of hardware, the number of synapses, the number of dendritic branchings – doesn’t look adultlike until twenty to twenty-five years after birth.”⁶⁵ While studies have shown that neuroplasticity (the rewiring of neurons and pathways in our brains) can take place in adults, people need to formulate positive patterns as young as possible. By learning and interacting with spiritual practices, emerging adults may actually be formulating healthier pathways in their brains. *The Compassion Practice* serves as the foundational spiritual practice of this curriculum by offering a step-by-step process that not only encourages participants to learn to react

⁶² Andrew Newburg and Mark Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain* (New York, NY: Ballentine Books, 2010), 63.

⁶³ Newburg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 43.

⁶⁴ Newburg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 56.

⁶⁵ Sharon Begley, *Train Your Mind Change Your Brain* (New York, NY: Ballentine Books, 2007), 113.

compassionately but also helps form an increased capacity for healthy self-reflection and awareness.

What is a spiritual practice? The best definition in this context comes from a book written on the spiritual practice of pilgrimage.⁶⁶ In it, Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook defines spiritual practice as a “regular ritual that opens our hearts, connects us to the Divine, awakens us to the present moment and the world around us, and reminds us of what is most important.” She emphasizes the role of spiritual practice in opening the self, making space for stillness and listening, as well as Divine movement and insight. While *The Compassion Practice* can be a spiritual practice alone, it is more accessible when a participant is grounded and open. For this reason, each session of *Cultivating Radical Compassion* begins with an opportunity to learn and engage in a Christian spiritual practice. The idea of focusing on compassion is a bit foreign for the emerging adults who participated in this study, perhaps because, as Andrew Dreitcer mentions in his book *Living Compassion*, traditional Christianity does not offer any compassion practices. He also explains, however, that “even when Christian spiritual practices do not mention compassion at all, they carry an assumption that to engage them is to become more compassionate since that is an inescapable characteristic of being made in the loving image of God.”⁶⁷ By opening each session with a spiritual practice, participants begin the process of opening themselves up to compassion. The curriculum introduces students to three different spiritual practices: Lectio Divina, Centering Prayer, and The Ignatian Examen.

Lectio Divina

⁶⁶ Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, *Pilgrimage – The Sacred Art: Journey to the Center of the Heart* (VT: SkyLight Paths, 2013), 169.

⁶⁷ Andrew Dreitcer, *Living Compassion: Loving Like Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 2017), 15.

Lectio Divina invites participants to engage Scripture, song, nature, or other expressions, “with the ear of the heart, for a word, phrase, sound, or image that holds for them, a word from God.”⁶⁸ Rather than searching for meaning by engaging a text historically or critically, Lectio Divina allows participants to engage the text as it is experienced and to reflect on their reaction to it. Rather than listening to a song for an overall theme, Lectio invites participants to focus on a meaningful image, word, or phrase that resonates with them, and then to elaborate on what the word, phrase, or image is saying. Traditional Lectio practices call for four or five steps: silence, reading/listening, reflection/meditation, prayer, and moments of contemplation. For the purposes of *Cultivating Radical Compassion*, this process was simplified to include two rounds of listening in some places, additional readings in others. Generally, participants are first asked to listen for a word or phrase that sticks out to them. Then they share aloud only that word or phrase. Second, the text is read or the song played again, asking participants to share how or why that word or phrase is significant to them or how it speaks to them. After the third reading, participants are asked to spend time in silence allowing the Divine to speak to them, offering prayers and reflecting on their Divine connection. Lastly, participants are asked to listen for an invitation. Does the word, phrase, or image speak to them in a way that invites an action, movement, or new understanding?

In *Cultivating Radical Compassion*, Lectio exercises are included because of their accessibility. For students who have not had much experience with spiritual practices and who are often in the midst of discerning their own belief systems, Lectio offers them an entry point because it is rooted in their perceptions rather than what they know about a text or song. Participants are often challenged by understanding that they need not focus on having “right” or

⁶⁸ Teresa Blythe, *50 Ways to Pray* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 45.

“wrong” answers, rather focus on what they experience is the goal. Lectio offers them an opportunity to be open to the Divine in the way they feel most comfortable and often allows for great discussion among participants as they generally focus on different words, phrases, or images. Lectio allows for creativity as well; utilizing Scripture, other texts, and music offers pathways for different learning styles to tap into this practice.

Centering Prayer

Prayer practices offer many forms from which to choose. Emerging adults are not likely to desire any type of prayer during which they have to speak aloud. While some have had experience with centering prayer, the majority have not. In addition, with the goal of equipping students with tools to reduce anxiety, centering prayer fits the bill. In fact, at its core, centering prayer is rooted in the prayer method Father Keating and Father William Meninger developed in the 1970s called the “Prayer of the Cloud.”⁶⁹ This “sending up a word of love in God’s direction” was intentionally developed as an accessible way for all persons to pray, whether having had theological training or not.⁷⁰

Centering prayer allows space for participants to focus on three things: awareness, attention, and intention. While awareness is taking note of that which is going on around them, attention asks on which particular things they are focusing. Asking emerging adults about what they pay most attention to and what is in their field of awareness can be a spiritual exercise all by itself, causing them to reflect on priorities and making space for the Divine in the everyday. However, the intention is most important in the context of centering prayer. Focusing on intention allows centering prayer to function for all persons, as they discern a word or symbol on

⁶⁹ Dreitcer, *Living Compassion*, 65.

⁷⁰ Dreitcer, *Living Compassion*, 65.

which to focus. The specific word or image itself is not the focus; the focus is the intention and desire to remain open and available to the Divine. When discussing centering prayer in *Living Compassion*, Andrew Dreitcer says “the best sacred word is neutral; it is a reminder, a symbol of your intention.”⁷¹ Utilizing this word or image as a grounding point reminds participants of their intention to be open to the Divine. Creating this space is the core purpose of centering prayer. Upon choosing a word or symbol of their intention to remain open to the Divine, they then take a period of time to sit with this intention. The word or symbol chosen becomes most important when their minds wander or distraction comes about. At that point, participants focus back in on their word or symbol, saying it silently perhaps, which recalls to their attention the intention they have to stay open to the Divine.

This practice is introduced in the second session of *Cultivating Radical Compassion* and offers participants a foundational understanding and experience with centering prayer. For many, this has been an easily accessible practice at stressful times, such as before an exam or meeting with a professor or advisor. It allows for space and helps participants grasp onto the concept of “catching our breath,” which is the first step of *The Compassion Practice*. The fifth session of the curriculum begins with a brief period of centering prayer before participants really dig into the often-challenging process of offering compassion to a difficult person in their lives.

Ignatian Examen

The initial steps of *The Compassion Practice* can be challenging for anyone who has not spent time reflecting on emotions, reactions, and inner movements. For emerging adults who are still in the process of meaning-making, these inner movements can be both helpful and, at times,

⁷¹ Dreitcer, *Living Compassion*, 67.

a hindrance to their growth. As an additional exercise to empower participants to reflect on these inner movements, they will spend time focusing on the Ignatian Examen. Though Ignatius suggested this reflection be done twice a day, often this exercise is done at the end of the day as a reflection on the past twenty-four hours. The version in *Cultivating Radical Compassion* comes from a website that is a ministry of the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus, Jesuits.⁷² The daily Examen is a prayer technique described by Ignatius in *Spiritual Exercises*, a book of his contemplative practices. The Examen offers a time of reflection and is comprised of five steps. Each participant receives a handout explaining these steps more thoroughly, as shown in Appendix B.

- Become aware of God's presence: Grounding yourself in God's presence and seeing yourself as God sees you.
- Review the day with gratitude: What happened this day for which you give thanks?
- Pay attention to your emotions: Think about your emotions, were you able to love, be loved? Receive or share compassion?
- Choose one feature of the day and pray: Reflect on a challenge you experienced, any sorrow, frustration or regret and pray as you are led.
- Look toward tomorrow: Set your intentions for the next 24 hours. How can you show compassion?

The purpose of this exercise is two-fold. First, when participants arrive at the appointed time, they often come in having had a long day of class or rushed by other obligations. Starting with the Examen helps them to slow down and focus, making space for what is to come with *The Compassion Practice* later in the session. Second, as mentioned above, fostering opportunities for participants to self-reflect on their emotions, reactions, and inner movements will help them

⁷² "The Examen," *Ignatian Spirituality*, accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen>.

engage *The Compassion Practice* more thoroughly. By doing this, participants are often better equipped to communicate openly and honestly as this process allows them the space to do so. This too is an easily accessible method for emerging adults to make meaning and engage spiritually.

Meditational practices

The many benefits of meditation are a very important aspect of *Cultivating Radical Compassion*. Meditation is one of the key avenues through which participants cultivate space for stress reduction and healing. *The Compassion Practice* itself can be a form of meditation, though for these purposes, intentional meditations are led throughout the curriculum because this is a very new process for most participants. The biological and neurological benefits of meditation are many, as evidenced by numerous studies showing similar benefits, such as lowered heart rate, blood pressure, and increased focus, all by-products of breathing deeply and slowing down.⁷³ In *Altered Traits*, Daniel Goleman and Richard Davidson discuss an analysis of forty-seven studies on utilizing meditation to treat patients with mental health problems. They found that “meditation can lead to decreases in depression, anxiety, and pain – about as much as medications but with no side effects. Meditation also can, to a lesser degree, reduce the toll of psychological stress.”⁷⁴ Therefore, as reduction of anxiety is one of the markers this curriculum focuses on, it includes various levels of meditation. Not only does meditation have immediate positive influence on our bodies, it can also help retrain the pathways in participants’ brains, as Newburg and Waldman indicate in *How God Changes Your Brain*, calling meditation

⁷³ This is the first step of The Compassion Practice also, *catching our breath*, and will be discussed in the next section.

⁷⁴ Daniel Goleman and Richard Davidson, *Altered Traits* (New York, NY: Random House, 2017), 207.

“particularly important for the brain because it counteracts our biological propensity to react to dangerous situations with animosity or fear. It also makes us more sensitive to the suffering of others.”⁷⁵

In the realm of compassion, allowing space for understanding the suffering of others is crucial as it comprises the third step of *The Compassion Practice*. For *Cultivating Radical Compassion*, time spent in meditation and prayer is focused on creating space for compassion both for self and others. Studies show that compassion meditation offers an even bigger impact more quickly. Compassion meditation done for “seven total hours over the course of two weeks leads to increased connectivity in circuits important for empathy and positive feelings, strong enough to show up outside the meditation state per se.”⁷⁶ This has been the case for students participating in the *Cultivating Radical Compassion* curriculum. They share a new awareness of their emotions and feelings, both within themselves and directed at others. With a little practice they are able to embody the basics of meditation and put them to use throughout their day.

Nonviolent Communication

Learning the basic steps of nonviolent communication (NVC) gives participants additional tools to examine and name the inner movements that are occurring while also offering steps to help identify the need(s) underlying these feelings. *The Compassion Practice* calls its practitioners to pause, take the U-turn and then pay attention. As the initial step in taking one’s PULSE, cultivating an awareness of one’s feelings and needs and having the ability to name them is crucial. Emerging adults are often bombarded with a variety of emotions as they make meaning of the world around them. Before reaching adulthood, most emerging adults will suffer

⁷⁵ Newburg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 54.

⁷⁶ Goleman and Davidson, *Altered Traits*, 250-251.

from bouts of heartbreak, anger or frustration, and of course fear, anxiety, and also great moments of joy and satisfaction. As previously discussed, the years of emerging adulthood are marked by developmental changes, defining of self, social networking, relationship building, all within the realm of discerning vocation and purpose in larger society. Recognizing one's feelings and needs in the midst of these changes allows space to engage and discern before living reactively. In addition, the steps of NVC are also an aid in healthy communication across the spectrum of one's life.

In *Living Nonviolent Communication*, Marshall Rosenberg explains NVC as “a language of life in which compassion comes naturally. Showing us how to express what is alive in us and to see what is alive in other people.”⁷⁷ At the most fundamental level NVC allows for understanding of self and other, making it personally empowering and a language geared for conflict resolution. There are four beginning concepts to embody when learning to use NVC:

- Making observations: facts not judgements.
- Identifying feelings: arise separately from other people, I feel _____.
- Expressing Needs: affection, creation, freedom, identity, participation, protection, recreation, subsistence, and understanding.⁷⁸
 - Separate needs from strategies to meet needs
- Making a request based on recognized feelings and unmet needs: specific do-able action made in the present, not about the future.

These steps as introduced in session five of the curriculum assist participants as they transition from taking the PULSE of another person to whom they want to show compassion to the most difficult process of utilizing the Compassion Practice for a difficult other. Exploring what it means to embody love and show compassion for an enemy can initiate negative feelings. Should

⁷⁷ Marshall Rosenberg, *Living Nonviolent Communication* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, Inc, 2012), vii.

⁷⁸ Rosenberg, *Living Nonviolent Communication*, 24.

this occur, it must be addressed by utilizing the process inwardly until a non-judgmental, non-reactive space can be cultivated toward the other. The feelings and needs wheel NVC handouts offer accessible pathways to naming the feelings that spring forth as well as the needs that underlie these emotional reactions.⁷⁹

The Compassion Practice

“The heart of the Christian path of love – radical compassion – can be *taught*.”⁸⁰

Serving in campus ministry can feel a lot like starting a new church every fifteen weeks, as semesters change and students graduate. At the time I began working with *The Compassion Practice*, not only was I working to grow and change the atmosphere of this campus ministry, but I was also facing increased pressure to prove effectiveness in the midst of pretty significant funding cuts from the United Methodist Annual Conference. Transformative ministry happens quickly with emerging adults in the college setting, as they are soaking up all sorts of new learnings both academically and socially. However, success can be difficult when the necessary financial support now must come from hours spent on fund development, all while having to constantly prove that the work with students matters. This tension left me feeling pretty frustrated at the situation, and unfortunately, with myself. An Enneagram Two describes me completely because I want to please people and serve, even to the point of losing the ability to differentiate well between self and others. This frustration merged with my first class with Frank Rogers and an introduction to his book, *Compassion in Practice: The Way of Jesus*. I read the book, reread the book, did the exercises, and began to recognize the power within the steps of this practice. At that time, with a different batch of students, we began to offer weekly space for

⁷⁹ See Appendices H and I.

⁸⁰ Dreitcer, *Living Compassion*, 13.

meditation and reflection. I also worked through *The Compassion Practice* with my leadership team, because I thought this could be a life-changer for them, if they could grasp the concepts effectively. That small group utilized the text *Compassion in Practice*, which students read and discussed in meetings. This initial trial made an impact on the students, though asking them to read the text and embody the steps of the practice was not a realistic expectation of them, as they were already bombarded with homework for their classes. In addition, without additional explanation and practice, they were unable to translate the text into meaningful practice.

The critical role *The Compassion Practice* could play for emerging adults became more real to me when I was driving a student to in-patient mental healthcare after a trying day of suicidal intention and constant bargaining and prayer. This student had suffered a sexual assault in her freshman year and had not told anyone about it, until finally the emotional toll the assault took on her self-esteem and confidence overcame her ability to rationalize it away. Before this incident, I had helped a student in the midst of a panic attack, unable to breathe or make sense of the world around her. The stress of her academic program and the high standards to which she held herself would not allow her space to breathe, literally. Another student in my first year of ministry felt certain she was a failure and that was all she would ever be. This depressive episode led her to believe that ending her life would be better for everyone and that taking multiple prescription drugs would be the way to go. In reality, this student was thriving, well-loved and respected, one of those students who attracted others and welcomed them whole-heartedly. She was an ambassador and leader for the university, and yet she was unable to show herself the same grace and compassion she gave so freely to others. She and I worked through this on multiple occasions, only once involving a trip to the emergency room for some backup. *The*

Compassion Practice could have offered her the tools to reflect on her pain, offer herself compassion, and embody new life.

As mentioned previously, there are four components to *The Compassion Practice*. The first step calls for a time-out. In this initial step participants are asked to pause, breath, and come to a place of non-judgment about that which is taking place inside of them. Only from this less reactive space can the second component of “taking your pulse” be fruitful. This step asks participants to Pay attention, Understand empathically, Love with connection, Sense the sacred, and Embody new life. In order to investigate the interior movements taking place and to understand them more fully participants are asked to check for the presence of any FLAGS (Fears, Longings, Aching wounds, Gifts obstructed). Utilizing this same PULSE and FLAG process, the third component asks participants to take the PULSE of another person. Utilizing these steps allows space for compassionate understanding of self and the other, which opens up the opportunity to discern a compassionate action, or to engage the last component of the practice: Deciding what to do.

On a regular basis, I encounter emerging adults seeking to define their purpose and live into a vocation, rather than a profession. To do that, they must have the capability to discern both that inward voice, which for many is the Holy Spirit/God/Divine, and those exterior narratives that pull for their attention. *The Compassion Practice* offers tools for self-understanding, allowing emerging adults space and time to engage those exterior forces from a grounded, emotionally healthy, non-anxious place. *The Compassion Practice* also offers an accessible, holistic approach to embodied compassion that provides positive lasting results. When engaged and adopted by an emerging adult, *The Compassion Practice* is a successful tool to reduce anxiety and relieve and reorient stress, all in the context of greater self-understanding and care.

Because of this, I have designed a curriculum that, when engaged by emerging adults, offers them tools that can assist them for the rest of their lives. The following pages will examine the steps of The Compassion Practice within the context of the *Cultivating Radical Compassion* curriculum.

Chapter Six: The Curriculum: An Overview⁸¹

This curriculum should only be taught by someone who has read and had experience with the process outlined in *Compassion in Practice*. *Cultivating Radical Compassion* relies heavily on that text, though participants need not read the text to participate fully. This is one way in which the curriculum differs from the study guide located within *Compassion in Practice*. This was done intentionally, as the intended audience for *Cultivating Radical Compassion* is college students and other emerging adults who may not have the capacity to engage the steps without some guidance. However, this curriculum makes the practice more widely available to all people and can assist them in making the practice a lived part of their lives. Written in tandem with Frank Rogers, *Cultivating Radical Compassion*'s main objective is to open students' awareness of compassion and increase in them the ability to live compassionate lives. In doing so, they will experience other benefits, such as the reduction of anxiety. In addition, this class equips participants with the knowledge of deep-breathing techniques, prayer and meditation practices, and a variety of spiritual exercises that they can draw on when facing struggles or stress. Perhaps the curriculum's success can best be measured by the participants' ability to engage this practice outside of the actual class meeting, which will be discussed in the conclusions section of the paper.

Initial retreat: Tapping into the reality that is you!

This initial gathering of participants is a bit longer than the rest of the sessions. The goals for this time together are to take preliminary steps that open participants to the kind of self-reflection called for when engaging *The Compassion Practice*:

⁸¹ Cultivating Radical Compassion is located in its entirety as Appendix E.

- Introduce and give overview of the class.
- Complete Enneagram
- Basic understanding and discussion of Enneagram types
- Begin the process of self-discovery, understanding, growth

This also serves as a time for participants to get to know one another at a level that promotes safety and sharing for the following sessions. The retreat begins with introductions and then enters into a time of centering. For this group, we began with a Lectio exercise utilizing the song, “Never One Thing,” by May Erlewine.⁸² This song was chosen because its message relates so well to the purpose of the Enneagram, which exemplifies the multifaceted nature of our personalities. Starting with an exercise such as this opens participants to one another and helps them recognize that this class is not about right or wrong answers but about sharing in a collective experience.

Completing and sharing about the Enneagram assessment is the primary focus for this retreat. The Enneagram serves as a gateway for participants to engage what they know to be true about themselves through the lens of nine personality types. The participants use the EnneaApp on any smartphone or computer. This application provides a wealth of Enneagram knowledge and explanation that launched participants on a real journey of discovery and imagination. The great advantage of utilizing the app for this is that the information stays with the participants and is very easy to access.

For weeks after this initial session, I had students in my office borrowing *The Road Back to You* to learn more about the Enneagram and how much they related to what it said about their particular type.⁸³ The session has even spurred discussion around tables of students eating tacos,

⁸² “Never One Thing,” by May Erlewine, YouTube: <https://youtu.be/qH0qrHdb8jg>.

⁸³ Cron and Stabile, *The Road Back to You*.

as they share how the Enneagram has opened for them a new understanding of living out both their best characteristics (heart points) as well as those that challenge them (stress points). This session leads directly into the content for the next lesson as it gets them thinking about the “masks” they wear that cover up their best selves as they learn to cope with the world.

Session One: Masks

This lesson draws from the participants’ reactions to and integration of the information they learned about their Enneagram types. The goals for this session are

- Experience of Reflection utilizing Lectio Divina,
- Review of the Enneagram,
- Understanding of grounded/Image of God self in connection with ability to be compassionate,
- Ability to recognize interior movements (heart/stress point) within the story of the Prodigal Son, and
- Overall understanding of compassion in the context of *The Compassion Practice*.

Gathering for this lesson offers participants an opportunity to digest even further what they learned about themselves during the initial retreat. While the Enneagram can often serve as a window to the soul, it can also bring about recognition of those parts with which participants struggle. This lesson speaks of the masks participants put on to prevent themselves from being vulnerable; often those attitudes or behaviors become fairly permanent as they learn to cope with the world.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, the masks that participants use as children may become a hindrance to them as they mature. By grounding their work in the understanding that their best selves are rooted in the Image of God within them, they begin to understand how to best live compassionately. This is a key component to working *The Compassion Practice* successfully, the

⁸⁴ This is what is often referred to as one’s *childhood wound*, or that which opened in us the recognition that we are not as safe as we once thought as babies.

recognition that when they are at their best, when they are living out of their Image of God selves, they live engaged compassion. Sessions two through six introduce participants to the steps of *The Compassion Practice*.

Session Two: Time Out

The second session introduces participants to the first step in *The Compassion Practice*: *Catching our breath*. Goals for session two are

- Introduce participants to breath meditation,
- Increased self-awareness and ability to identify active emotions and reactions, and
- Introduce participants to centering prayer.

Much of this lesson simply allows for space. Emerging adults are in the midst of figuring life out, which generally means they have a number of things coming at them all at once. This lesson allows them space to breathe; in fact, it challenges them to slow down for an hour and just be. Participants in these university groups responded positively to this session and were seemingly quick to embody the principles of centering prayer.

I chose centering prayer for this session because it does not require the brain-power of speaking aloud. Centering prayer is about stillness, defining an intention for a time. This exercise allows participants to focus on what they most desire. For some, it was compassion; for others it was peace, or love, or letting go. Participants discussed aloud what their intentions were going to be, as participants needed to begin with a good understanding of the role of intention. Participants were asked to engage in centering prayer for ten minutes. Most groups went a bit longer than that; though beforehand, they expressed fear in that length of time. Multiple participants said that they were able to use a variation of either the breath meditation or centering prayer in the days following this session. Some mentioned it helping them to focus before exams;

others mentioned the calm it offered before a difficult conversation; still others utilized this as a method to slow down before going to sleep.

Session Three: Check Yourself!

Session three begins the difficult work of making sense of the emotions and impulses that occur within each of the participants. Goals for this lesson are

- Engage participants in the Ignatian Examen – as a pathway for reflection on emotions/impulses,
- Teach the steps of taking your PULSE, spending time teaching the FLAG questions, and
- Actively participate in the PULSE process utilizing a focus image of an interior movement.

This lesson is the participants' first introduction to the PULSE and FLAG processes. These two ideas can be difficult to comprehend in one lesson, but overall, the majority of participants responded with a great deal of depth. One group in particular, led by a campus minister colleague, grasped the Examen and began using it at the beginning of all of their student-staff meetings. Offering participants handouts that explain the Examen, PULSE, and FLAG steps really helps them to learn the process.⁸⁵ Another participant was moved by the process in such a way that she could speak truth to a dysfunctional parent in a way that helped heal an aching wound in her spirit. Others recognized and spent time investigating self-sabotaging impulses and behaviors, coming to a new understanding of what triggers and hurts needed recognition before moving forward. While this step certainly does not lead to immediate results, it begins the process of opening themselves to care and healing compassion, which in the end can lead to a larger movement of compassion for others, and even the world.

Session Four: Loving Others Compassionately

⁸⁵ See Appendix B, C, and D.

Session four allows for a transition from focusing on self to focusing on another person for whom they want to show compassion. Rather than jumping immediately to utilizing this practice with persons who challenge them the most, they started here. Goals for this session are

- Review the process of PULSE for self,
- Discuss what Scripture says about loving our enemies, and
- Participate in the PULSE process for another person.

Session four begins with a time of focus on the Peace Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, which was new to many of the participants in these classes. I chose this prayer specifically because of its focus on movement toward compassionate action and empowerment. One important aspect of both this session and the next are the opportunities to review the PULSE and FLAG steps; these can be difficult to grasp when introduced to them for the first time. Utilizing *The Message* version of Matthew 5:43-47 allows participants to hear a familiar Scripture with a different perspective and also hits home the idea that enemies may actually be emphasizing something in them that needs to be cared for. This translation actually poses the thought clearly by saying, “I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst.”⁸⁶ When feeling so negatively toward someone else, participants can find difficulty in allowing them to serve as a mirror to their own soul. For emerging adults who are in the process of working out their own identities, this can be a life-changer. One of the most powerful aspects of *The Compassion Practice* is the recognition that someone cannot offer another person compassion until that person has the capacity to do so. If participants are so emotionally triggered by that person, they must first go through the process on themselves: catching their breath, taking their PULSE, answering those FLAG questions, and offering compassion to that in them which needs

⁸⁶ Matthew 5:44 (The Message).

healing. Only then can they begin from a grounded, non-judgmental space to offer compassion to another person.

The process of engaging this curriculum in a group has given the participants the vocabulary to communicate about that which is taking place within them. This is truly beneficial for them in a myriad of ways. A number of participants noted the value of taking time to recognize the emotions and impulses taking place within and being able to give voice to their purposes, both negative and positive. One unintended impact that this curriculum has had is in the area of communication, which will be discussed further in the conclusions. Session four seemed to particularly engage students as they discussed the idea of enemies, defining what an enemy signifies, and recognizing again how enlightening the Enneagram types can be when they are dealing with persons who challenge them and often differ from them. Enemies take on a different light when confronted by those potential fears, wounds, and struggles that may be at war within persons with whom they have great frustration or anger. Creating space for emerging adults to ponder such things is a unique experience in the context of their lives. Often, they express a feeling of being bounced around, while trying to cling to what they know they are good at. In the midst of recognizing that as they mature things change, going back “home” is not always as easy as they had hoped.

Engaging in *The Compassion Practice* with a difficult other does not take place until the end of session five, as that is often the most challenging step. To gain some experience in utilizing the PULSE process with another person, participants begin at the end of session four by taking the PULSE of another person with whom they want to share compassion. This process can be worked through as a group, if participants feel comfortable in sharing. By doing so, they can

ask for help should they have any questions about the process. In addition, participants really seemed to learn from one another's insight to the process.

Session Five: Get Creative

Session five allows participants to dig a bit deeper into the power of *The Compassion Practice* as they engage the opportunity to extend compassion to difficult persons. Much of what has been learned in the previous sessions becomes well-integrated by the end of session five.

Goals for this session are

- Learn basic components of Non-Violent Communication (NVC),
- Practice recognizing internal movements and impulses and their meaning,
- Explore Jesus' creative way of compassion, and
- Participate in PULSE process for a difficult other.

This may be the most important session of all, as it calls for participants to both inward reflection as well as offering compassion to someone that is challenging. If participants can grasp the PULSE and FLAG processes in this session, they really begin to experience the practice's transforming power.

The session begins with a primer on Non-Violent communication. Teaching participants the four basic components of NVC provides another avenue for discerning and naming the inner-movements and feelings present before engaging the steps of *The Compassion Practice*.

Utilizing the feelings and needs wheels participants begin by learning the four basic components to NVC: observing, naming feelings, claiming needs, and making requests. Before engaging *The Compassion Practice* with a difficult other, it is important for participants to recognize that their feelings are not dependent upon another person, but are symptoms of an unmet need that can often be met with direct, clear communication. Participants begin this session by practicing the four components as they engage in a brief meditation.

Based largely on the explanation of Matthew 5:28-42 found in *Compassion in Practice: The Way of Jesus*, this session discusses compassion as an action that disempowers the aggressor while retaining their dignity. At the same time, the victim (oppressed person) is empowered while recognizing the humanity of the aggressor. This session is challenging while also encouraging participants to think creatively about methods for compassion. This is the time in the curriculum where participants clearly learn that compassion is not about being a doormat or allowing someone to continue abusive behavior; rather, it is about healing and solutions that empower. Healthy boundary setting is a skill with which many people struggle. Helping emerging adults navigate making space, setting healthy boundaries, and thinking through how to do it with self-confidence are other important by-products of this curriculum. The PULSE process assists participants in boundary-setting by teaching them how to listen to their emotions and reactions from a grounded place. Taking the PULSE of someone who has caused harm or whose behavior is triggering offers an opportunity to see the person behind the problem, which prevents participants from demonizing or making false assumptions about them. All of this helps participants to discern what is next: a compassionate action.

The closing activity for session five helps to reground the participants. Going through this process for a difficult person in their lives can be quite emotional. The closing activity provides time for participants to process a bit of what they have experienced before heading out from the group. This time, in closing, the participants are asked to go around the group and say some affirming words to one another. The groups found this exercise fun and enjoyed being able to lift one another up, especially after sharing about such a personal process.

Session Six: Putting it all Together

Session six marks the end of the participants' journey into compassion and equips them with what they will need to embody this practice in their everyday lives. This session turns their hearts to the response they feel called to make having completed the PULSE process.

Compassionate action, in this sense, is the intentional next step they take in their lives. Goals for session six are

- Experience a shortened Lectio Divina in song,
- Discuss what is meant by *compassionate action*,
- Ground rules for compassionate action,
- Discern a compassionate action upon completion of PULSE practice, and
- Complete evaluation questionnaire.

This session gets participants thinking about what shape this practice can take in their lives. It offers some concrete ideas for compassionate actions and lays down some ground rules. These ground rules are rooted in the example of Jesus and affirm the dignity of all persons. This session affirms what was discussed in sessions four and five adding an emphasis on the process of reconciliation. For emerging adults, reconciliation and forgiveness are often rather black and white. These concepts tend to be thought of as all-or-none, meaning that forgiveness can only occur if both parties are willing participants. Unfortunately, that is not always possible, and so time is spent in this session recognizing that taking the compassionate action may not always mean that the other person responds in the way they might hope. However, they are empowered when they take these steps regardless of the outcome. This discussion offered participants a chance to share and process together what reconciliation means and looks like in their context.

To close this session, and to bring an end to time together, participants take *The Compassion Practice* all the way through the final step to discern a compassionate action. This time participants are asked to focus on someone who exists in the periphery of their day. They

begin by taking this person's PULSE and close with a few minutes to consider what compassionate action could be taken on their behalf. For some, this came immediately and led to a desire to be more appreciative family or community members. For others, this took some time as students thought through what the concept of setting healthy boundaries, care for themselves, and how to have difficult conversations. To complete the course, and for this project, participants were asked to fill out an evaluation questionnaire.⁸⁷ This is an optional exercise. Also optional, participants were asked to put their name and address on one side of a notecard, and to write on the back one way they will embody compassion in their life. This is done so that the facilitator can send them a note of encouragement two or three months following the completion of the course. In closing, each participant is given a take-home Compassion Practice card to remind them of the steps.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ See Appendix F.

⁸⁸ See Appendix G.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations

The initial group of participants was entirely made up of college students or recent college graduates. The majority of these students are participating in internships through Wesley Foundation Campus Ministries. *Cultivating Radical Compassion* was utilized as the curriculum for their fall semester leadership development gatherings. The facilitators are all Wesley Foundation Directors, credentialed pastors in The United Methodist Church. Upon completion of the seven sessions, I received feedback from each facilitator as well as participant evaluations. This initial group of participants is only a small slice of the persons recognized within the category of emerging adulthood; therefore, further implementation of this curriculum will provide more all-encompassing results.

Feedback reflects that this class made a positive impact on the lives of these emerging adults. The concepts learned were valuable and accessible. Specifically, students mentioned the value of learning both the Examen and Centering Prayer techniques. Multiple students mentioned specifically utilizing Centering Prayer before taking exams or when having to give oral presentations in front of a group of people. The group of students from Michigan State University incorporated The Ignatian Examen into the beginning of their weekly leadership meetings as they found it a helpful tool to reconnect and focus the group. One of my students approached the Freshmen Seminar faculty, encouraging them to implement this practice into their introductory “college survival” classes. Students wished they had known of *The Compassion Practice* earlier in their college career.

Every evaluation noted the benefit of *The Compassion Practice*. Participants wrote of an increased awareness of their reactions and were able to articulate success in both utilizing the

PULSE process for themselves and others. They found easy engaging the first step of “catching your breath” in other ways throughout their days, often sharing that they were able to think before they reacted or spoke. For some who have been especially affected by the current political situation, learning the steps to offer compassion for a difficult person was very helpful. Even more helpful was the explanation of compassion as a vehicle for empowerment and action. Participants grasped the importance of grounded conversation, creative solutions to conflict, and their ability to make change.

My original goal, to prove that *The Compassion Practice* is a means by which emerging adults can reduce and control anxiety, has proven true to some extent. I faced some challenges in my ability to measure this accurately. The GAD-7 questionnaire was completed before session one, session three, and session six. These students met every two weeks. The GAD-7 measures a two-week span of time. However, I believe it would have been more accurate if the class met every week. I am in the process of testing this with another group of participants. The situational nature of college students’ anxiety also hindered the use of the GAD-7 as an accurate indicator of anxiety reduction over the duration of the entire curriculum. They mention on each assessment the situational causes that are impacting their answers. For example, a student who may have relatively low anxiety the majority of the time would reflect high anxiety during midterm week. Other students mentioned right away that they had recently been clinically diagnosed with anxiety or depression and were being treated with medications or had recently begun therapy. The GAD-7 was beneficial in that it offered a bit of insight as to how each participant is wired before learning the practice and to notice any large changes throughout the process.

The goal to prove the practice as an effective means to reduce anxiety almost became secondary to teaching about compassion. I supposed, originally, that this curriculum needed to

alter mindsets or behavior surrounding anxiety, and while it accomplishes that to some extent, it also offers a perspective change that is really important in the current national climate. While racism, sexism, classism, and other hate/prejudicial groups are increasingly prevalent in the news, this class and *The Compassion Practice* challenged participants to recognize their personal biases and prejudices. Many of these biases had been shaped by their experiences and the communities from which they originated. Some of these biases, based on stereotypical understandings of categories such as success, beauty, and worth were fueling debilitating negative self-talk. Through the process of taking the PULSE of a difficult other, participants were challenged to recognize the innate value of all persons and offered an avenue through which to gain understanding of self and other. Reflecting on Jesus as a model for nonviolent communication empowered participants to speak truth while preserving the integrity of even the most difficult persons. As a whole, this experience allowed them to express new awareness of their ability and role to promote and engage compassion at all levels of interaction. What they have learned has the ability to impact social change, as they integrate it into their lives now and in the future.

I was taught from a young age that kindness is contagious. I believe that compassion is also contagious. The more comfortable students became with this process, the easier it was for them to put it into practice. As they began to embody the steps of *The Compassion Practice*, they noticed an increased awareness of the people around them, and a desire to engage in conversation. Conflicts that would have previously been avoided were dealt with quickly and compassionately. Compassion emboldens compassion. This has been evidenced in recent studies done in university settings “suggesting that witnessing both compassionate and pro-social behavior inspires others to behave in a similar manner, with significant psychological benefits

for those witnessing the positive event.”⁸⁹ James Doty, Professor of Neurosurgery at Stanford University School of Medicine and Director of the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, said he suspected that acts of compassion were contagious. In an effort to prove this, he designed an experiment to increase students’ awareness of acts of compassion. Utilizing a mapping tool and incident reports, Doty found that students who reported witnessing acts of compassion had “statistically higher levels of flourishing and compassion for others. And statistically significant lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress.”⁹⁰ This speaks to the significance of teaching college students about compassion, and this as a great benefit in addition to the others.

One of the positive, though unintended outcomes of this class, was an increased desire and ability for direct, clear communication. Statistically “15,220,700 texts are sent every minute of every day worldwide, not including app-to-app messaging.”⁹¹ Experience indicates that the majority of college students would rather converse via text message than any other form of communication. Texting allows for almost immediate access to another person, but it does not allow for a clear understanding of a person’s intentions or tone of voice. Sending a text is much easier than having a hard conversation with someone who has angered or caused harm. It is easier to say hurtful things when they are not looking into the eyes of the person to whom they are being said. Multiple students shared that through this process, they were emboldened to have honest, direct communication with people who they feared or who had angered them. Some of

⁸⁹ James R. Doty, “Elevation Mapping: Pro-Social Compassion Maps,” *Huffington Post*, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/project-compassion-stanford/elevation-mapping-prosocial-compassion_b_4784148.html?utm_hp_ref=tw.

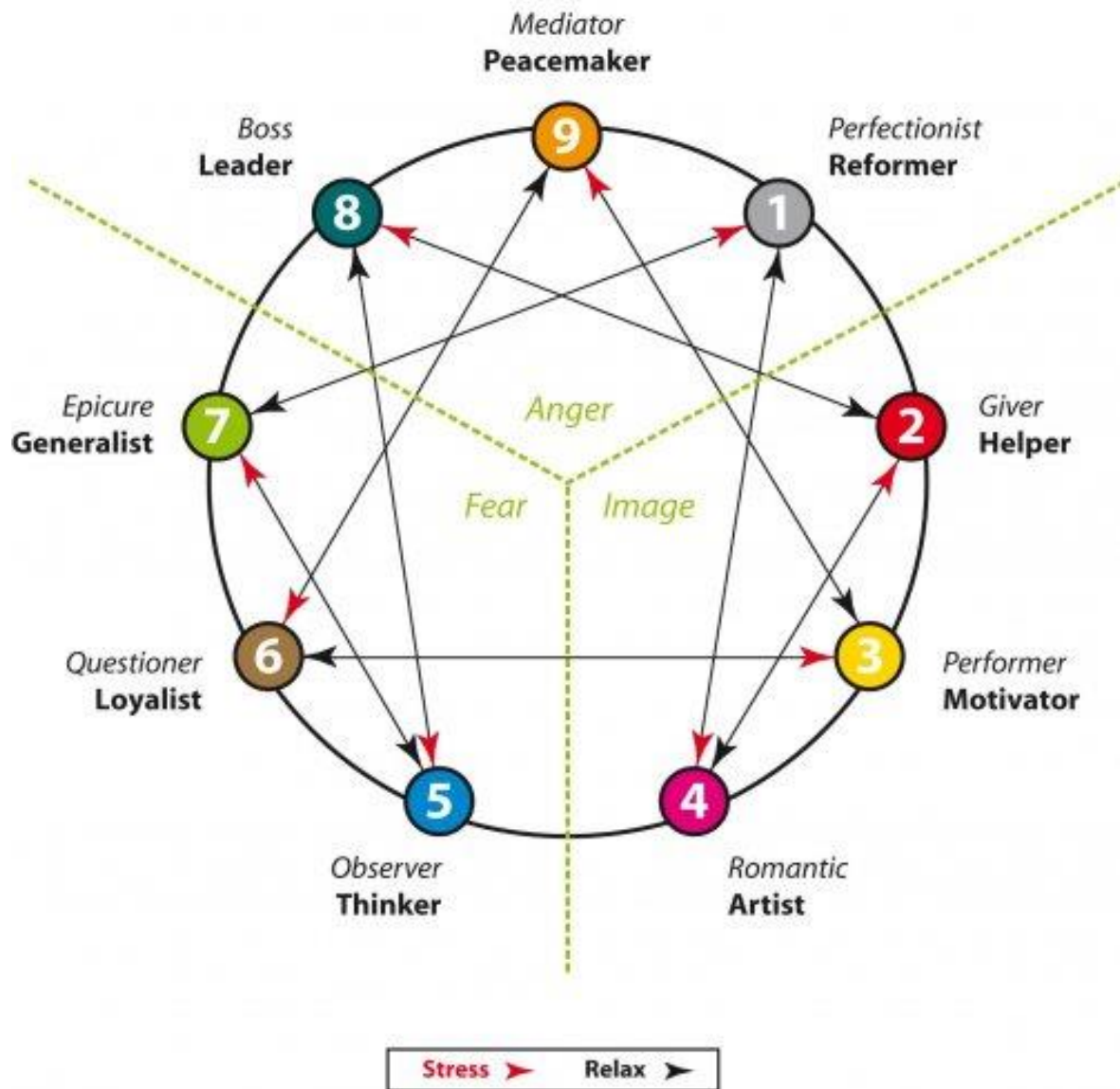
⁹⁰ Doty, “Elevation Mapping.”

⁹¹ Kenneth Burke, “Answer All Your Questions,” Text Request, accessed May 24, 2016, <https://www.textrequest.com/blog/texting-statistics-answer-questions/>.

these relationships had left students feeling powerless previous to this practice. By taking their own PULSE and looking at the other person through the PULSE process, they found their voices and engaged in healing conversations and boundary setting. Working through this process in small groups also gave participants license to share safely and learn from one another's experiences.

In conclusion, this project affirms my passion to share *The Compassion Practice* with emerging adults. I recognize that my study has been limited by geography and narrowly focused on college students; however, this curriculum has the potential to positively impact the umbrella of persons considered emerging adults. In working through this curriculum, participants learn valuable skills that will have a positive impact long after the class is done.

THE ENNEAGRAM



⁹² Cythia Bourgealt, "Which Enneagram Type is Cynthia?" Digital image, The Contemplative Society, November 23, 2017, Accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.contemplative.org/enneagram-cynthia/>.

Reflecting on Your Day: The Ignatian Daily Examen

I. Become Aware of God's Presence

Imagine how God sees you. Ground yourself in this understanding and in God's presence. Ask God to help you have clarity as you begin reflecting on your day.

II. Review the Day with Gratitude

*For what are you grateful today?
What happened for which you can give thanks?*

III. Pay Attention to Your Emotions

Look over the events of your day. How did you react? Focus on one or two moments that stand out. When were you loved? When did you love? Did your reactions or emotions draw you closer to compassion or further from it?

IV. Choose one part of the day and pray

Reflect on a challenge you experienced, perhaps a place you said or did something you regret. Express your sorrow or frustration over this moment and allow God's compassionate forgiveness to shed light on the situation.

Discern any further action you may be prompted to take.

V. Look Toward Tomorrow

Set your mind on what is to come. How can you reflect the light of love into your circumstances, interactions, or relationships? For what do you long? How might you experience God's compassion in the next 24 hours?

Take Your PULSE

P

Pay Attention. Without judgement ask yourself: What do I notice going on inside of me. How am I reacting? Can I name what I am feeling?

U

Understand. Listen to yourself. What is your reaction telling you? Is something inside of you crying out, suffering, grieving, angry? What do you need to soothe this agitation?

**Check your FLAGS*

L

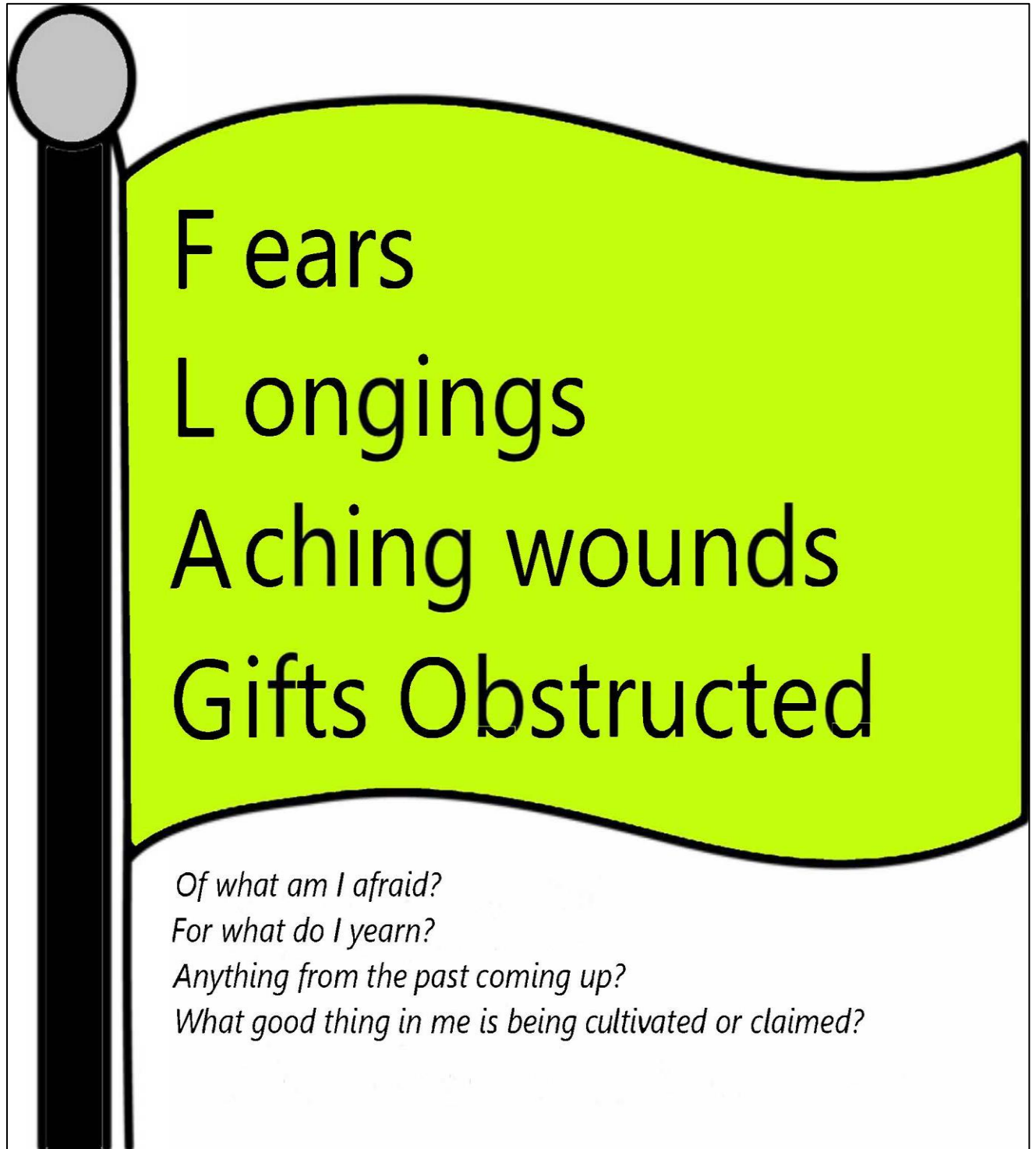
Love it. Once you've identified a possible cause, love that place in you that is hurting. Care for yourself in this moment.

S

Sense the Sacred. Say to yourself, "I am God's beloved. I am loved." Root yourself in the recognition that God's compassion is present with you even to the depths of your core. Allow God to hold and heal you in this space.

E

Embody the goodness emerging in you. As you heal what good springs forth in you? What gifts or qualities shine forth?



Take *Their* PULSE

P

Pay Attention. Without judgment or reactivity ask yourself: What do they look like? What do I notice going on in-side of them? What might be the reason for their behavior?

U

Understand. Listen to them. What is their reaction telling you? Is something inside of them crying out, suffering, grieving, angry? What might they need to soothe this agitation?

**check their possible FLAGS*

L

Love them. Once you've identified a possible cause, open your heart in compassion and understanding to their need. Love that place in them that is hurting. Care for them (even from afar) in this moment.

S

Sense the Sacred. Invite the presence of God to surround them and remind them of their belovedness. Root yourself in the recognition that God's compassion is present with both of you. This connection may allow you to enter into prayer.

E

Embody the goodness you hope can emerge in them. As they heal what good may spring forth? What positive gifts or qualities can now shine forth? What can you learn about yourself from this interaction?

Appendix F: Cultivating Radical Compassion Curriculum

Cultivating Radical Compassion: A Curriculum for Young Adults

Based on *Compassion in Practice: The Way of Jesus*

Overall Goals for Cultivating Radical Compassion Class:

- Equip participants with tools to develop compassion for self and others
- Enhance ability to discern compassionate actions.
- Enhance ability to center self in/on compassion
- Equip participants with skills for conflict management, stress/anxiety management
- Increased ability to express and understand oneself and to communicate directly.

Opening Retreat: “Tapping into the Reality that is You.”

To Prepare:

- This can be as long as necessary for the group that is gathering but probably a minimum of two hours.
- Having a copy of *The Road Back to You* would be helpful.⁹³
- Ask participants to bring their smart phones or have online access available to take the enneagram.

Goals for retreat:

- Introduce and give overview of the class.
- Complete Enneagram
- Basic understanding and discussion of Enneagram types
- Begin the process of self-discovery, understanding, growth

Outline of Retreat Time:

- Introductions
 - Clarify personal information and needs (preferred pronouns, what each needs to be heard and feel safe in the space, basic life info, etc.)
- Time of worship/centering/meditation
 - Depending on the needs/type of group and utilizing your gifts discern what would allow persons to become fully present to the space and one another.
 - (Optional Idea: Using the song “Never One Thing” by May Erlewine and offer a time of reflection using the Lectio Divina method.⁹⁴

⁹³ Cron and Stabile, *The Road Back to You*.

⁹⁴ “Never One Thing,” by May Erlewine, YouTube: <https://youtu.be/qH0qrHdb8jg>.

- First Listening: ask participants to listen for a word or phrase that sticks out to them. Have them share only that word or phrase.
 - Second Listening: ask participants to share how/why that word or phrase is significant to them or how it speaks to them.
 - *Never One Thing* offers a reflection on how multifaceted we are as human beings. This connects with our next step in the retreat of utilizing the enneagram as a tool for understanding. It may also be helpful to ask participants how they see this relating to self-compassion and compassion for another.
- Start Enneagram Process: Utilize *The Road Back to You*, Cron & Stabile.⁹⁵
 - Explain what Enneagram is and is not
 - It is a helpful tool for understanding the self
 - It is not a horoscope or personality quiz
 - It is mysterious – its origins are ancient yet one might say it is not particularly scientific
 - It is a sort of “color wheel that describes the basic archetypes of humanity’s tragic flaws, sin tendencies, primary fears, and unconscious needs.”⁹⁶
 - It can help us understand and ourselves and others, and our interactions with the world.
 - Download EnneaApp on smart phones or utilize online assessment such as <http://exploreyourtype.com/>.⁹⁷
 - You may want to read questions aloud if all using same app
 - Overview of each number
 - Allow students to explore the app, it offers a lot of interesting and easy to understand information about the enneagram and each type.
- Break/Meal/Snacks
- Discussion in groups of same number/or individually what resonates/what doesn’t.
 - Intro to triads/heart & stress points/wings.
- Closing:
 - Hand out paper/markers/etc. Ask participants to draw a picture/symbol that represents their feelings at this moment, in light of what they have learned about themselves/their Ennea #, etc. Take some time to share these with one another.
 - Questions for reflection: (may want to handout on paper)

⁹⁵ Cron and Stabile, *The Road Back to You*.

⁹⁶ Heuertz, *The Sacred Enneagram*.

⁹⁷ Hearthstone Counseling LLC, www.enneaapp.com.

- How do you get in your own way/what traits/personality characteristics trip you up the most often?
 - Do you believe you are in line with you have been created to be?
 - Does your past interfere with your present?
- Closing prayer:
 - “May you recognize in your life the presence, power, and light of your soul. May you realize that you are never alone, that your soul in its brightness and belonging connects you intimately with the rhythm of the universe. May you have respect for your individuality and difference. May you realize that the shape of your soul is unique, that you have a special destiny here, and eternal happening. May you learn to see yourself with the same delight, pride, and expectation with which God sees you in every moment.”⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Cron and Stabile, *The Road Back to You*, 18.

Session One: Masks

To Prepare:

- Have participants bring their EnneaApp information with them – make sure all participants have done the enneagram assessment
- Familiarize yourself with the flow of session one.

Opening: Time of Centering:

“Sooner or later we must distinguish between what we are not and what we are. We must accept the fact that we are not what we would like to be. We must cast off our false, exterior self like the cheap and showy garment that it is. We must find our real self, in all its elemental poverty, but also in its great and very simple dignity: created to be the child of God, and capable of loving with something of God’s own sincerity and his unselfishness.”⁹⁹

Use this quote in a Lectio Divina type exercise: Read quote slowly each time.

- *First Read: As you listen, notice a word or phrases that touches you, resonates with you, attracts or even disturbs you.*

As you feel comfortable share your word or phrase.

- *Second Read: As you hear it read again, reflect on the word or phrase that you chose for a few minutes. Listen for how the word or phrase is speaking to you at this moment in your life, what significance does it have for you, does it demand or challenge you?*

As you feel comfortable briefly share your thoughts.

- *Third Read: When you feel ready, openly and honestly hear the prayers of your heart that arise spontaneously within you from your experience of your word or phrase. These may be prayers of gratitude, need, lament, or praise.*

Allow for a brief period of silence

- *Final Read: Allow yourself to simply rest in and be open to Sacred compassion. Offer yourself kindness and care. Are you being called into a new way of being? Are you called to do something inwardly or outwardly?*

Learning:

Word “personality” derived from Greek (persona) meaning mask. How do we confuse the masks we wear with our true selves? (*For more info The Road Back to You, 22-24*)

⁹⁹ Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island* (NY: Harcourt, Inc., 1955).

At the opening retreat we were given time to share about the things that shaped us as young children. Some enneagram assessments call this your *childhood wound* or the relationship or experience that shook your safe foundation as a child, or the situations that aided in creating and shaping your personality.

The threats we experience lead us to develop survival tactics that work for us as kids, however as we mature these tactics can become limiting, unhealthy and may actually prevent us from living into our potential.

It is easy in the busy-ness of life to feel like we are losing ourselves, or even questions who we really are. That is when we can get grounded in the knowledge that God knows who we are. We are people wired for compassion and can bring that about most easily when we realize that the person “who we think we are, here and now, is at best an imposter and a stranger.”¹⁰⁰

Discussion:

Brief review of Enneagram from last session – make sure all participants have completed the assessment.

Discussion of stress points/heart points of each person – what resonates with you, what does not? (This info is available on the EnneaApp).

- Ask: How does our reaction to stress distort the characteristics of God within us?
- Ask: In what way do you think your number/or personality reflects some aspect of God?

Share:

“Every number on the Enneagram teaches us something about the nature and character of the God who made us. Inside each number is a hidden gift that reveals something about God’s heart. So, when you are tempted to persecute yourself for the flaws in your own character, remember that each type is at its core a signpost pointing us to travel toward and embrace an aspect of God’s character that we need.”¹⁰¹

- The Enneagram helps us recognize our masks, and stress points that take us away from our compassionate core. The Compassion Practice can help us refocus and reclaim the best of our identity, the grounded compassionate self that resides within us. Just as these Ennea numbers show we are each unique in our make-up, it offers clues to how we may best relate to other people and situations. For all of us, when we are at our best and grounded in the fact that we are created by God we can live out compassion. This is

¹⁰⁰ Cron and Stabile, *The Road Back to You*, 24.

¹⁰¹ Cron and Stabile, *The Road Back to You*, 228.

manifested in as many different ways as there are unique personalities, so as we move forward remember that there are no right/wrong feelings, answers, ideas, etc.

Bringing it Home:

Scripture Reading: Luke 15:11-32 (Read the story aloud, have them participate if they are comfortable)

Questions:

- What personality dynamics are at work here? What other of the enneagram characteristics do you see at play? (childhood wounds, stress points, heart points, etc.) Where do you see compassion at work in this story?
- Working through this type of self-realization can actually be troubling. Are there any parts of what you have learned about yourself so far with which you are struggling?

The Compassion Practice tells us that “The path of Jesus – summed up as loving God with every dimension of our being, cultivating an authentic love for ourselves, and loving our neighbors as ourselves – was, at its core, a way of radical compassion. Jesus proclaims that we are already held in God’s compassionate embrace, we are already acceptable in God’s sight...Jesus seeks to restore our personhood not diminish it. The spiritual path he teaches empowers human dignity, emboldens abundant vitality...”¹⁰²

Ask: How do you define compassion?

In *Compassion in Practice* compassion is defined as: Being moved by others experiences and responding in a way that intends to either ease their suffering or promote their flourishing.

- **Ask: Has your faith/spiritual life led you into a more compassionate life? How/Why? In what ways has this message of compassion been distorted or hijacked in the religious realm?**

This class will help us to recover and discover the means to remain in that compassionate, best-self place no matter what happens in our lives.

Closing:

- Ask participants to share a story of compassion from their own experience.
- If appropriate close in prayer.

¹⁰² Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 13-16.

Session Two: Time Out

To Prepare:

- Familiarize yourself with the flow of session two.
- Practice the meditation.
 - Decide if you want to include some meditational music.

Open: Catching your breath meditation

1. Relax. Ask participants to get comfortable in whatever way they need to. This should take some time, don't rush through it. You may want to put on some meditative music, check YouTube for options.

The Script: Take some deep breaths, inhaling into the deepest part of your stomach. If helpful place your hand on your abdomen and notice it's rise and fall. As you breathe in and out extend the inhale and hold for a few seconds, then exhale as much as possible. Inhale deeply again, hold it for a moment, and exhale. As you breathe allow yourself to rest and relax with the rhythm that naturally occurs. Continue to breathe in, hold for just a moment, and exhale as long as you can. (Allow for a few minutes of silence and breathing)

Imagine that you are breathing in the Light of God with every inhale, and with every exhale you are breathing out anything that disconnects you from your grounded, content, self. As you continue to breath this may take on a certain color or picture, you may recognize it as a light, or other sensation such as warmth or peacefulness. As you breathe allow this light to permeate your being.

As you continue to breathe, become aware of your body one part at a time. Breathe the Light of God into each part as you inhale and allow it to cover and heal any brokenness, frustration, or distraction. Begin with your toes, breathing in the healing light through your feet, and up into your ankles, and calves, your thighs, your lower back, your belly, heart, into your arms and hands, up to your shoulders, neck, throat and face. Relax all those muscles around your mouth, your jaw, your ears and your eyes, up into your skull, and brain around your scalp and forehead.

Is there a part of your body that is tense, in need of attention? Continue to breathe into that place and allow it to release. Continue to breathe in and out rhythmically, peacefully. Allow this light to wash over you, as you breathe. Should you become distracted, notice the thought, feeling, sensation and continue to breathe as it relaxes, settles, or dissipates.

(Allow for a few minutes again)

When you are ready to re-enter this space, allow the light of God to continue washing over you. Notice how you feel, any thoughts that come to you and remember this space to carry on should you need to come back to it during the day.

Take a few minutes to regather in the space, allow folks to move around and find a comfortable seat for the rest of the discussion.

Reflection and questions:

Take a few minutes to talk about their experience with the meditation. Was it difficult, easy? Have they meditated before? Were they able to relax? Could they get comfortable?

When was the last time you were “knocked off center” as in failed to be your best self, reactive, aggressive, etc.? (*Allow them to share about this incident/person/etc.*)

As you look back on that incident or moment what do you feel? How did you react outwardly? Inwardly? Even now are you reacting as you think about it?

Did compassion play a role in this incident? How might it have played a role?

Learning:

For the next few sessions we will focus on one step of The Compassion Practice, while also having the opportunity to put it all together. These are the steps, and they will make more sense as we go along.

1. Catch Your Breath
2. Take Your Pulse
3. Take the Other Person’s Pulse
4. Decide what to do

Today we are focusing on step one: Catching our breath. This step helps us stop and take a time out in order to retain our ability to think and act out of a grounded and compassionate place.

The first step of The Compassion Practice helps us to find solid ground when we get knocked off of center by reminding us that we are rooted in God’s love.

Ask: What emotions hijack you most often? What happens when you get hijacked?

- *Allow them to answer and share*

Share this quote:

“When we become activated, we need to wedge some space between our emotions and our behaviors, our impulses and actions. Becoming aware of our emotions, drives, and internal states instead of acting unconsciously consumed by their power creates a space between impulse and behavior. This is the difference between reacting to life’s circumstances and responding with grounded reflective self-awareness.”¹⁰³

Step One allows us make space by taking a time out and getting grounded.

How?

- Take a deep breath.
- Regulate your breathing (slow and deep).

¹⁰³ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 47.

Get Grounded:

Ask: What are some ways you use that help you to be grounded?

Some ideas:

- Change your location
- Engage your body (dance, or exercise, or stretch, etc.)
- Connect with a Trusted Person
- Pray, Meditate, Journal, etc.

Step Two: Remembering

- Reach out to someone for care – or reflect on the persons in your life who have loved you well.
- Offer yourself care: take some time to do something for you, something that you enjoy and that benefits you.

To be grounded in our best-selves may be quite similar to what the Enneagram told us about our heart points – when we take on the good traits of another number to strengthen our own. When our emotions or situations hijack us, we tend toward our stress points, and generally cannot operate out of compassion for ourselves or others.

Bringing it Home:

Teaching on Centering Prayer:

“Centering prayer creates in us a receptacle for compassion, helps us receive and become grounded in the constant flow of Divine Compassion, which then can allow for Compassion to flow from us to others.”¹⁰⁴

Centering prayer is one of the most accessible ways to pray. Connected to contemplative prayer, and rooted in ancient Christian, Eastern, and Buddhist practices, it became more well-known in the 1970’s when Trappist Monks from St. Joseph’s Abbey in Massachusetts, including Thomas Keating, published books on the subject. Unlike other forms of prayer, it focuses on quieting your mind, making space for Sacred Compassion (Love, Peace, etc.) and allowing yourself the opportunity to stay grounded and catch your breath.

Centering prayer can be very simple, and I challenge you to enter into this time as relaxed and open-minded as you can. The goal for this type of prayer is to cultivate total availability to Divine Compassion. This type of prayer can be focused on lots of other things too, such as peace, love, joy, etc.

There are three things to think about:

- **Awareness** is noticing whatever might be happening around and within you.
- **Attention** is focusing your awareness on a particular thing.

¹⁰⁴ Dreitcer, *Living Compassion: Loving Like Jesus*, 66.

- **Intention** is wanting and willing something, even to the point of acting.

Step One: Choose a word that reminds you of your intention to be available. This word serves as to point you in a direction you want to take. It should be a neutral reminder or symbol of your intention. When you say the word, it reinforces the thing you most want in this moment.

Step Two: Get Comfortable, close your eyes, begin to focus on your word. (This word may take the form of a sound, or imagine, or color too). Connect with it however you can be most available. If at any time another thought, feeling, or idea drifts into your mind say the word to remind you of your intention to be available.

Remember that failure in centering prayer only offers you more opportunities to return to your intention, which is actually a very good thing! The whole goal is to keep us open to our intention. Be patient with yourself.¹⁰⁵

You may want to play some meditative music during this. For our classes, it may be helpful for them to talk about the idea of choosing a word – or to share what their word is, or to have you share any experience you may have with centering prayer. Try this practice out for as long as you feel comfortable – maybe 10-15 minutes if you can. It may feel really foreign to them.)

Closing:

Ask them how it went, if they were able to focus, etc.

Encourage them to practice Centering Prayer at any point throughout their day, it can be a helpful way to ground us.

Close in prayer.

¹⁰⁵ In *Living Compassion* Andrew Dreitcer points this out saying, “failure means you have countless chances to activate your intention, countless chances to exercise that vital spiritual muscle, countless chances to practice being available to God,” 68.

Session Three: Check Yourself!

To prepare:

- Familiarize yourself with the flow of session three.
- You will need to have the daily Examen exercise, PULSE and FLAG handouts available.

Opening: Getting Grounded with the Daily Examen:

St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Catholic Order of the Jesuits, authored *Spiritual Exercises* around 1522, after having a significant conversion experience while recovering from a battle wound.¹⁰⁶ *The Exercises* offer great insight into his understanding that it is through discernment that we directly connect with God. In other words, when we reflect on our own thoughts and actions, we often find connection (or lack of connection) with the movement or grace of God. Awareness of this can open us up to what we might consider mystical experience or a depth of connection with that which is Sacred.

Introduction to the Examen:

Generally, this is done in the evening as a reflection on the day. It offers an opportunity to take notice of where God is active in our lives and where we may have been a bit off center, as we spoke of in the last session. Like Centering Prayer (from the last session) this too is a form of contemplative prayer, offering a way to get grounded. We will start with this exercise today as a means of catching our breath and entering into a deeper time of self-reflection. Maybe you can think of this exercise as going through the last 24 hours and looking for moments when you experienced (or lacked) Divine Compassion.

For more information an easily accessible website: <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com>

Notes: Similar to last session allow participants to get comfortable. The provided handout has the steps for this type of prayer. It may be most helpful to copy it for each participant to take with them, or look at as you go along. It may also be helpful for participants to have a journal available to write down any reflections as you go through the steps. Allow for participants to relax, ask them to enter into a time of connecting with their breath, breathing in and out, allowing for longer exhale and a period of centering (directions for this can also be found in last sessions info). As you feel comfortable lead them through the steps- take your time. Bring them back fully into the space and regather.

Spend some time sharing about this process – note anything that stuck out or offered insight for the participants. If helpful you may want to go through the steps (2-5) and see if anyone has something to share.

¹⁰⁶ Ignatius of Loyola, Saint, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*, trans. Elisabeth Meier Tetlow (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987).

Learning:

Remember that last session we began the compassion practice by *catching our breath*, the first step in staying grounded and centered in our best selves. Today we are going to learn about the next step, *Taking our Pulse*. This step is sort of like looking into a soul-mirror at those times when we find ourselves off-center, triggered, or stifled. This step begins the process of restoration within our deepest selves, and reminds us that it is “when our hearts beat freely with compassion that we are restored.”¹⁰⁷

Ask: Is compassion something that flows naturally from you? Can it be cultivated?

Just as we have learned through use of the Enneagram, it is easy for us to slip into those masks that often allow us to function, survive, even thrive all the while not living into our true Image of God selves. This step in the compassion practice helps us to begin peeling off those masks and healing that which can hold us captive.

We can categorize these masks:¹⁰⁸

- Emotions
- What we *tell* ourselves: inner voices of criticism, frustration, judgment, etc.
- Behavioral desires
- Daydreams: escaping reality (maybe to a desert island, or being stuck on what we wish we would have said/done.)
- What our bodies tell us: headache, pits in our stomachs, nervous butterflies, tension.

These masks, just as those emotions that hijack us are not who we are at our cores. They disconnect us and can enslave us, taking control and driving us right off the cliff (cue: Thelma and Louise 😊) Often our response to this only enhances our journey off course – as we try to will ourselves to keep at it because we are ashamed, embarrassed, or discouraged that we feel like this in the first place. We end up covering up one mask with another, and the cycle continues until we catch our breath, and take our pulse.

Ask: What do you remember about Step One: *Catch your Breath*? Were you able to utilize what you learned since we met last?

(The PULSE handout explains the steps for taking our PULSE. The FLAG handout goes right along with the U step in taking our PULSE. You may want to copy these for participants or at least have them visible to look at as you go through each step. As you go through the steps you may need to explain further the intention behind each step.)

Taking our PULSE:

¹⁰⁷ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 66.

¹⁰⁸ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 69.

Once you've caught your breath and are grounded:

P – PAY ATTENTION

U- UNDERSTAND – Use the FLAG process to dig deep into what is really happening at the base level of your reactions/feeling/emotions/etc.

L-LOVE – When we begin to understand what is hurting/crying out within us we can examine it and love it. It may help to try to look from above or take a far-off perspective. For example: It may be easy to picture ourselves as children who felt inadequate, while as adults we think we should be able to handle things with ease. Loving that hurting child within us might be an easier connection. “This step allows the suffering inside of us to feel fully seen, heard, held, and healed.”¹⁰⁹

S-Sense the Sacred – allow the Love of God, Compassion, a strong loving parent, to embrace this place inside of you.

E-Embody the new life that can come forth as this healing continues. (This can be as simple as finding a way to offer yourself patience, kindness, or care)

Ask for reflections on this PULSE process – any confusion or questions? Any initial reactions?

Bringing it Home:

In order to get a clearer understanding of the PULSE and FLAG process let's take a few minutes to examine those masks from earlier that tend to journey with us most often. This can serve as a bit of practice for understanding this step of The Compassion Practice, but remember, you don't have to get it all today. It takes some practice!

Give everyone a piece of paper, maybe have crayons/markers/etc. available. You could also use Play-doh if folks would rather.

Step One: Think of a powerful emotion, inner voice, behavioral impulse, or bodily reaction that has journeyed with you frequently in your life recently, or one that has given you difficulty previously.

Step Two: As you reflect on this interior movement take a few minutes to draw/model/picture what this might look like, is there a symbol or word that represents this movement for you? Remember that this is not about whether you are Bob Ross or not, just let yourself be expressive.

Step Three: Spend some time PAYING ATTENTION to it – try to be really open and non-judgmental toward it and note your reactions – if you find that you are not able to be open to it but are having another reaction take some time to focus on that until you can focus openly on your image again.

Step Four: Dig into this movement – what is it saying to you? In what situation(s) does it show up? When is it stifled or hidden? What is it saying to you – about you – in this moment?

¹⁰⁹ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 78.

Step Five: Try to understand it utilizing one or more of the FLAG questions:

- *What is your deepest fear underneath the movement?*
- *What is the longing associated with it?*
- *What aching wound do you notice that causes you to react?*
- *What gift that you are trying to give feels stifled or discouraged?*¹¹⁰

Step Six: Ask participants to write down and fill in this summary:

- *Whenever I (the movement they've been focused on) get activated during the day, I need you to hear and understand _____.*

Step Seven: As we finish this exercise invite a sacred presence to be with you on this journey – allow God (Jesus, Spirit, Compassion, Love, Peace, etcetera.) to meet you in the tender space with this movement, offering healing kindness and compassion.

Should this movement show up in the next few days allow yourself to come back to this process: breath, recognize it, ask yourself what it wants you to understand, and when possible offer it compassion and healing.

Closing:

As you wrap up the session perhaps people will want to share about this process, what they have learned or with what they are struggling. Allow time to help them through the process if they do not fully grasp it. ***We do not want to leave them in a state of confusion, pain or shame about this – so check in to make sure they understand that healing 7th step – this is supposed to be life-affirming, not condemning in any way).***

Close in prayer.

¹¹⁰ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 84.

Session Four: Loving Others Compassionately

To Prepare:

- Familiarize yourself with the flow of session four.
- Decide how you want to lead the opening, you may want to have copies of *The Prayer of St. Francis* available.

Opening:

Say: Today we are going to focus on the third step of The Compassion Practice: Taking another person's PULSE. Before we do that let's spend a few minutes reflecting on a well-known prayer, The Peace Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi:

You may want to read this together, or have each participant take a sentence. You could also do this as an opportunity for Lectio Divina (3 readings: focus on a word/phrase, focus on what that word phrase is speaking to you, focus on what it is calling/challenging you to do or become). Whatever you decide, read it through at least two times to offer them a chance to reflect and ask participants what meaning they find within it.

Lord make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is despair, hope
Where there is darkness, light
And where there is sadness, joy
O divine master grant that I may
not so much seek to be consoled as to console
to be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love
For it is in giving that we receive
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned
And it's in dying that we are born to eternal life
Amen

Offer time for sharing/reflection. What parts stick out, are meaningful or challenging to them?

Ask: How peaceful are you feeling these days? What things/situations/persons are most difficult or triggering right now? Has there been time when you have stopped to catch your breath and get grounded? Have you been able to pay more attention to your emotions and impulses and your reactions? Have you been able to put what you've been learning here into practice?

Review:

When we left last time, we had just gone through the process of taking our PULSE, were you able to engage this process at any time since we met?

Remind them of the PULSE process from last lesson (you could use the handout) or talk through each step:

- I. *Catch Your Breath*
- II. *Take Your PULSE:*

P – PAY ATTENTION

U- UNDERSTAND – Use the FLAG process to dig deep into what is really happening at the base level of your reactions/feeling/emotions/etc.

L-LOVE – When we begin to understand what is hurting/crying out within us we can examine it and love it.

S-Sense the Sacred – allow the Love of God, Compassion, a strong loving parent, to embrace this place inside of you.

E-Embody the new life that can come forth as this healing continues. (This can be as simple as finding a way to offer yourself patience, kindness, or care)

Learning:

This process is helpful for us inwardly, but can also help to open space within us to show compassion to others. Living the *Way of Jesus* calls us to not only love God and our neighbor as we love ourselves, but also to love our enemies.

Ask: When you hear the term enemy, what comes to mind? (Perhaps people who have hurt us or our loved ones, those who are greedy, those who misuse power, etc.) Can you think of some people that might fit into the enemy category in your life? (Folks who embody political/ideological views different from own, people of whom we may be suspicious, people whose behavior disgusts us, people who push our buttons – like bad drivers!)

Do you think loving our enemies means setting ourselves aside or allowing others to mis-treat us/others? Is this what God had in mind?

This passage from Matthew might shed a little bit of clarity on what Jesus meant:

“You’re familiar with the old written law, ‘Love your friend,’ and its unwritten companion, ‘Hate your enemy.’ I’m challenging that. I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus?”

Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that."¹¹¹

Matthew 5:43-47

Ask: *What might it look like for an enemy to bring out the best in you?*

This step of The Compassion Practice allows us to make space to understand another person. It does not equate to letting another off the hook for harm, abuse. What it does do is make room within us to look compassionately at ourselves and others, even those with whom we have difficulty. It helps us process and discern another person's actions and behaviors without the emotional reactions that often only rile us up further.

Taking the other person's PULSE is a similar process to taking your own.

Step One: In order to even consider working through this process we must first cultivate space within ourselves to show this person compassion. If we aren't willing or feel angry or troubled at the very thought of showing compassion then we should start with taking our own PULSE, which you learned last session. Once you are able to care for the space in you that is triggered you can often find space to really look at the person who is challenging you most.

Step Two: Taking another person's PULSE:

- P- PAY ATTENTION to what they are doing, and what they look like while they're doing it. Reflect on the person's behavior, emotions, attitude and word. What is portrayed in their movements? (Often this happens in your mind, as the person is not standing there in front of you.) Try to really see the person in the truth of their experience.¹¹²
- U- Try to UNDERSTAND the suffering at the root of their actions, emotions, and behavior. Listen deeply to their experience and ponder what might be at stake for them. Consider their FLAGS:
 - Fears: What do they seem to fear the most? What is at stake for them to behave in this way?
 - Longing: For what do they most deeply long? May there be some need that is not being met in them?
 - Aching Wound: Ponder this person's past, what might be at the root of this behavior? Perhaps they experienced something that lacks healing and continues to cause pain?
 - Gifts Obstructed: What good things or strengths are being stifled or discouraged that may long to arise in them?
- L-LOVE THEM. Yes, love them. Though our understanding of the person's FLAGS may be speculation, it allows us to cultivate a non-reactive, objective look at their humanity. Once we can do that – we can extend compassion and love.

¹¹¹ Matthew 5:43-47 (The Message).

¹¹² Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 97.

- S-SEND THE SACRED. Invite God (Compassion, Love, Peace) to surround this person. This may take the form of a prayer or some time spent holding this person in the Light, offering them healing and compassion.
- E-EMBODY the goodness you hope can emerge in them. What good thing may spring forth? What positive gifts or qualities does this person hold that the world needs? What do you desire for this person?

This may all sound simple, and yet even for the people who repel us the most, this practice allows for compassion to abound both within us, and within others. Choosing grounded compassion may be the greatest challenge of living in our culture today. While so much of our public life screams, “get angry, get passionate, get violent” this practice offers us a “path toward healing, vitality, and personal transformation.”¹¹³

Have you noticed that what makes another person angry may not make you angry at all? Vice versa? This points out that at the root, much of our anger, frustration, repulsion may actually lie within us. What inside of you needs attention when the yelling evangelist on the street corner thwarts your entire day? What cries out within you when someone’s discrimination or prejudice of another person prevents you from living fully? Perhaps our enemies actually “serve as mirrors that reflect to us the shadows of our own inner world.”¹¹⁴

When facing an enemy are you responding to an unhealed wound that continues to carry pain? Perhaps this person is causing that same kind of pain in the world or to someone you love? Does this person’s behavior make you feel a sense of shame in your own current or past behavior? Is there a part of you that feels really threatened or jeopardized by this person? Maybe this person is simply preventing you from flourishing with that abundant life Christ speaks?

Offering compassion to an enemy does not give them power, rather it helps us to grasp onto the power residing within ourselves. Offering compassion to an enemy does not mean we should never act (protest) or speak out against violence, abuse, discrimination and the like. It offers us the ability to do so from a healthy, whole place within ourselves. We will be talking more about this in the next lesson. Offering compassion to another person may often be the vehicle by which we offer ourselves compassion, healing, and life.

Bringing it Home:

Practice: In closing, let’s practice this step focusing on another person. We are going to work through each step together, but feel free to share only what is comfortable for you.

- I. Take some time to catch your breath. Breathe deeply from your belly, and rest into the rhythm of the rise and fall. Allow yourself to slow down and release. Breathe in as deeply as you can, and exhale as long as you are able. (Allow participants to be silent for a little bit).

¹¹³ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 99.

¹¹⁴ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 101.

- a. Think about persons that you know and care about. For this practice you are simply going to spend some time working through this process thinking of person with whom you would like to share compassion.

Allow persons to share about the person they have come up with – they may want to share a name only, their connection to the person, or a bit about the person.

II. Take his/her PULSE:

- a. Pay Attention:
 - i. Describe what you see: appearance, behavior, emotions.
 - ii. What might he/she be experiencing? What might be going on in his/her life?

Again, allow each person to share as they are comfortable – this will take a bit of imagination or remembering. You may encourage them to think of this person facing something challenging or memory of a time they shared with him/her.

- b. Understand: (Use your imagination if necessary)
 - i. What might be his/her deepest fear?
 - ii. What might he/she long for?
 - iii. What aching wounds may he/she be carrying that make this even more painful?
 - iv. What good things or gifts might he/she possess that are being stifled?
 - v. Love: Allow yourself to extend compassion to this person. How might you care for or extend love to him/her? Reflect on his/her behavior. What might it want you to understand? What healing might this person need?

You may want to go around discussing each of the FLAG points, or it may be easier just to go through all five and then discuss.

- c. Offer this person into connection with God, allowing the Sacred to encircle him/her. If moved to do so, offer them up in prayer or write down your thoughts and hopes for this person.

Ask participants in what way they might offer this person to God.

- d. As you finish your reflection are you moved to do something, change something, or recognize something about yourself? What can this person teach you?

Again, allow for discussion/sharing.

Closing:

Allow participants to ask any questions they may have or to process aloud if they are willing. How did this work for them? Are they able to grasp the process? Do any of them have a reaction that may require further tending (taking their own PULSE?)

As you go about your internships, classes, and everyday lives see if there may be an opportunity to utilize this practice of taking another's PULSE or your own. Close in Prayer.

Session Five: Get creative!

To Prepare:

- Familiarize yourself with the flow of the lesson.
- Have NVC Handouts available for participants.
- Have necessary technology available if you decide to use the PowerPoint slides.
- Prepare any materials you want to use for the closing activity (none are required.)

Opening: Introduction to Non-Violent Communication

Much of our time thus far has been spent on identifying and naming the inner movements at work in us. This can be a difficult aspect of the practice, as it is not something to which we are accustomed. To help us do this more effectively we will begin this lesson learning the basics of Non-Violent Communication. Developed by Marshall Rosenberg as a method for conflict resolution, this method of communicating allows for clarity of both feelings and needs which allow for greater self-understanding as well as understanding of the other. To begin, share with participants the handout on NVC.¹¹⁵ Spend a few minutes sharing about the 4 Components and offer clarity as you move through the bullet points for each step. Then invite participants to look over the feelings and needs handouts.¹¹⁶

Enter into a time of meditation utilizing the “Written Check In & Self Connection Exercise.”¹¹⁷ Participants may want to have journals/paper available to write down any insights they have during the meditation. Invite participants to get comfortable, close their eyes and begin to focus on their breathing. Similar to previous meditations slowly have them focus on the rise and fall of their abdomen, noticing the breath entering and leaving their bodies. As they breathe in ask them to inhale, hold it for a second, and exhale as long as possible. When participants are settled ask them to simply observe their thoughts. Notice them, but without judgement or reaction. Allow a few minutes of quiet. Then, following the prompts ask them to notice what feelings have been present in their hearts over the last 24 hours. Allow some time, encourage them to narrow in on one feeling. Then ask what is the need that comes up behind this feeling? Again, allow some time. Ask if there are other needs that arise? After allowing adequate time ask if there are specific requests they can make based on these needs? Remind them that these requests must be do-able and requested in the present, not future. Some of their requests may involve persons not in the class, so obviously, are not requests that can be met immediately, but they can be addressed as soon as possible.

Reinforce that feelings and needs are independent of other persons’ actions or behaviors similar to The Compassion Practice’s focus on non-judgment toward inner movements, as expressions of FLAGS crying out.

¹¹⁵ See Appendix G.

¹¹⁶ See Appendices H & I.

¹¹⁷ See Appendix J.

As you bring them slowly back into the space, ask them to write down any insights they have had. Allow for discussion on the process and ask how this might be helpful in the context of The Compassion Practice.

Ask: How have you been able to incorporate The Compassion Practice into your life in the last few days? Are there pieces that come more easily, moments when you have struggled? Are you feeling confident in taking the steps toward living into compassion?

Learning:

Last session we focused on taking the PULSE of another person. In closing we went through the PULSE process focusing on a person for whom we care or to whom we wanted to show compassion. Today we turn our eyes to those persons to whom showing compassion may be a real challenge. Today we focus on those persons that stir up in us righteous anger, those that bring forth in us emotions that can thwart our ability to live into our best selves, those who push our buttons.

With that in mind, I invite you to take a moment and reflect on the pictures on the screen. We will go through them a few times. Take note of your reactions, writing them on the paper provided. What thoughts, feelings, emotions arise? What are these reactions saying to you?

PowerPoint slides are attached, but feel free to edit as is most helpful for your group. Also make sure paper/pens are available for participants to write down any reflections.

On the 2nd time around say: As you view these slides you are invited to reflect on both your feelings and the accessibility of compassion within you – as you see these pictures could you offer that person compassion? What would it look/feel like? How can compassion exist in the midst of injustice or violence? Can it exist?

Allow the slides to play through a few times. Take a few minutes to share reactions – not focusing on the persons in the slides, but on the reactions/emotions stirred up within the participants. Help them to identify those emotions in the context of PULSE – as taught in the 3rd session. (Again, the feelings/needs handouts may be helpful here).

When we get going the wrong direction while driving, we generally look for the first safe place to pull over and take a U-turn. This can be a helpful image to think of when a situation or person causes a reaction in us that pulls us away from our grounded, best self. Once we are turned around and can catch our breath, we can then start to reflect on what it is that is actually taking place within us, and can begin the PULSE process.

Let's take a few minutes to look at some of the creative ways Jesus made space for compassion in the midst of injustice.

Matthew 5:38-42 says:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to

go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”¹¹⁸

How have you experienced “an eye for an eye?” How do we most often react to violence? Violence does seem to lead only to more violence. We want to fight for justice, for ourselves, for others which makes “turning the other cheek” seem like pretty bad advice, doesn’t it?

Actually, in all three of the instances above Jesus is speaking into life a third way – “the way of empowered compassion. It resists evil with the weapons of love and dignity and not with hate or submissive endurance.”¹¹⁹ Jesus gets creative.

Let’s act it out. (Ask for two participants to stand facing one another and role-play this situation:

Ask one person to strike the other’s right cheek. They will most likely try to use their left hand. Remind them that the left hand was recognized as unclean. Using the left hand would lead to punishment, perhaps even a fine. To use the right hand to hit the right cheek means a backhand slap. These folks were used to that as it was the humiliation treatment a master may give a worker or slave. Receiving a backhanded slap and turning the other cheek would leave your left cheek exposed. Should this person decide to slug you with a full-on fist that would mean an acknowledgement of equal power, thus turning this oppressive act on its head and preserving the integrity of the victim.¹²⁰

The other two scenarios offer similar conclusions, turning the tide on those who abuse their power. Should someone ask you for your shirt, give them your cloak too. Why? Because that would leave the debtor standing butt-naked. Nakedness is a no-no in this culture, bringing shame not on the person, but on those who saw him or her.

And what about being forced to go one mile, and then Jesus calling for an additional mile? Cue Simon of Cyrene, the man charged with carrying Jesus’ cross in the Synoptic Gospels. Roman soldiers could “ask” a Jew to do such tasks as long as they did not “incite unnecessary unrest.” Going one mile may be fine, but that additional mile may actually cause the soldier to be punished for going too far and expecting too much. That extra mile would cause some great uneasiness for the soldier and he may just ask for his pack back.

While at the surface Jesus seems to be allowing space for violence, when we understand the cultural nuances present in these passages we determine that Jesus is actually empowering the victim while disengaging the aggressor. It is important to be aware that the aggressor’s humanity is not diminished in these interactions, though the situation is de-escalated.

In seeking to follow the way of Jesus we are invited into acts of restoration and redemption for both self and other. Loving actions help us to compassionately engage the world around us while remaining strong in our Truth. This way of living stands opposite to the idea that loving our enemy allows for violence, abuse or injustice. We are called to confront injustice (people and

¹¹⁸ Matthew 5:38-42 (NIV).

¹¹⁹ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 121.

¹²⁰ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 122.

systems) in such a way that space is made for restoration and redemption. This calls for creativity, and often that can only spring forth when we are grounded, having taken the necessary U-Turn and that first step of catching our breath. Only then are we able to begin the process of recognizing and offer compassion to the person behind the behavior.

Can you think of other moments in Scripture where Jesus creatively disengages similar situations? (Woman caught in adultery: John 8, Luke 10: Mary and Martha, maybe even restoring Peter in John 21)

To put this all together we are going to go through the process of taking the PULSE of a difficult other. As you may expect, the first steps focus on your reactions and then turn to the other.

Bringing it Home:

Practice:

- I. Take some time to catch your breath. Breathe deeply from your belly, and rest into the rhythm of the rise and fall. Allow yourself to slow down and release. Breathe in as deeply as you can, and exhale as long as you are able. (Allow participants to be silent for a little bit).
 - a. Think about someone for whom you have difficulty feeling compassion, someone whose behavior or attitudes have triggered some form of reactivity in you recently. As you recall this person and whatever it is that triggers you, allow them to come to your mind and then imagine them going far from you, to some place that allows you to be safe from their presence.
- II. Take your PULSE:
 - a. Pay Attention: turn your focus inward and take notice of what is happening inside of you. What do you feel? What impulses are present? Stay as open as you can to this reaction without any kind of judgment.
 - b. Understand: Spend time examining this reaction/impulse. Ask yourself:
 - i. What FEAR exists underneath this reaction/impulse?
 - ii. Is there a deep LONGING within this reaction/impulse?
 - iii. Does an ACHING WOUND seem to be present?
 - iv. What GIFT or good thing in you is being stifled?
 - c. Love: As you come to understand this part of you offer it compassion, understanding and care.
 - d. Sense the Sacred: Allow this part of you to connect with the healing power of God (Love, Light, etc.) Consider the kindness God offers you and embrace it.
 - e. Embody new life: Are you aware of a new insight surrounding this reaction, are you able to understand it in a new way?
- III. Take the other's PULSE: Recall this person at the time when he or she was actively involved in the offensive behavior.
 - a. Pay Attention:
 - i. Describe what you see: appearance, posture, expression, behavior, emotions.

- ii. What might he/she be experiencing? What might be going on in his/her life?
- b. Understand: “Remember that this person’s words and actions are rooted in some suffering” as you reflect on the potential FLAGS at work: (Use your imagination if necessary)
 - i. What might be his/her deepest fear?
 - ii. What might he/she long for?
 - iii. What aching wounds may he/she be carrying that make this even more painful?
 - iv. What good things or gifts might he/she possess that are being stifled?¹²¹
- c. Love: Allow yourself to extend compassion to that part of this person that is suffering underneath this behavior. If this feels difficult you may try to picture this person as a child that needs care.
 - i. How might you care for or extend love to him/her? Reflect on his/her behavior. What might it want you to understand? What healing might this person need?
- d. Sensing the Sacred: Offer this person into connection with God, allowing the Sacred to encircle him/her. If so moved offer them up in prayer or write down your thoughts and hopes for this person.
- e. Embodying new life: Might there be something new at work within this person? What kind of healing could take place?

Take a few minutes for participants to share about this experience. If applicable, you may want to go step by step asking if they understand and were able to fully engage this process. What are their initial reactions, hesitations, or insights?

The last step, and the one we will focus on in our next session is to decide what to do. After taking the PULSE of another, you may be compelled to an empowering action. You may feel you have something to share the next time you encounter him/her, or you may simply picture them as that hurting child and be able to offer them compassion.

Closing:

For now, and in closing let’s take a few minutes to remind one another of the goodness we possess. How have you experienced the gifts that exist within the participants in your group. How have you witnessed the heart points of your group, spend some time giving thanks for and affirming one another. Close in prayer.

¹²¹ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 109.

Session Six: Putting it all Together

To Prepare:

- Familiarize yourself with the flow of the last lesson
- You will need the necessary technology to share the opening song
- At the end you will hand out the PULSE/FLAG take-home cards
- Have a copy of the evaluation questions for each participant
- If planning to do the closing exercise you will need note cards/pens

Opening:

Today we are going to start by listening to a song called *See the Love*—by The Brilliance: <https://youtu.be/V8SGRDvUdW8> (This is only the audio, there is also a video on YouTube of the band playing on the street, which you could show, but not necessary. Also, feel free to substitute a song that you find fitting.)¹²²

Play the song once through and ask folks to notice a word/phrase/image that sticks with them. If they are willing to share, ask them what significance this word/phrase/image has for them.

Then ask them to reflect on how this song might tie into what they have learned about The Compassion Practice.

Learning:

Say: Last time we met we took time to learn about offering compassion to those who are most difficult. Before that we spent time taking the PULSE of someone to whom we wanted to offer compassion. And previous to that was *catching our breath* and taking our own PULSE. All of this works together to provide for us a powerful foundation for cultivating radical compassion in the world. This last session focuses on what we do as response to this process. Compassionate action comes out of our recognition that compassion leads to restoration. What might these compassionate acts look like? (Perhaps they can list some. *If you need some ideas, the following compassionate actions are spoken of in Compassion In Practice 116-118: Generosity: offering resources to ease others' suffering. Service: caring directly for immediate needs. Witness: vigils, prayer services, protesting, etc. Solidarity: sharing the plight of those who suffer. Empowerment: equipping others with skills to aid in their own sustainability. Justice: public advocacy, non-violent resistance, civil disobedience*).

Allow participants to share how they have been involved in these types of compassionate action, or how they would like to be.

Say: “The Compassion Practice provides a path for discerning compassionate actions. Compassionate actions are those that are grounded, flow freely from the steady pulse of our core

¹²² “See The Love,” by The Brilliance, YouTube: <https://youtu.be/V8SGRDvUdW8>.

and caring Self, and nurture the pulse of restored humanity within the persons who suffering moves us.”¹²³

In regard to our last lesson, dealing with those who are difficult, even violent, author Frank Rogers points out four ways in which the Way of Jesus embodies radical compassion – these can serve as some basic ground rules as we discern compassionate actions.

- 1) “Acts of radical compassion are grounded in God’s love as the source of truth and power.”¹²⁴ We are not always capable of recognizing this on our own, it comes with recognition of the sacred source within us (remember all the way back to the Enneagram discussions). Our power is rooted in our identity as Children of God. This gives us worth, power, and hope. This also gives us courage to face those who create in us fear, as we recognize that “God is the foundation to our dignity, power, and capacity for compassionate resolve.”¹²⁵
- 2) Acts of radical compassion always preserve the victim’s humanity. As noted in our last lesson Jesus exemplified what it means to “stand up to violation with dignity, personal power, courage, and commitment to survive in the face of that which would degrade us.”¹²⁶
 - a. Compassion empowers us to do things like speak out against violence, ask for help from a trusted other, set healthy boundaries that limit our exposure to the aggressor, involve police or other authority figures, and generally stand up for ourselves.
- 3) The path of compassion also challenges us to preserve the dignity of the aggressor. We spoke of this last week as we took the PULSE of a difficult other, noticing those FLAGS which may offer us insight to the root cause of the behavior.
 - a. The behavior the aggressor exhibits makes sense to them in that moment. Though this is not a call to condone violent or abusive behavior. This challenges us to recognize that they too are made in God’s image, which allows us to “love our enemies and treat them with dignity and care, even while resisting their violence.”¹²⁷
- 4) It is important to recognize that all of this calls the aggressor “into a right and appropriate relationship.” This reconciliatory relationship does not come without some important conditions: repentance, remorse, restitution, and rehabilitation.¹²⁸

Even when dealing with the hardest of hearts this process allows space for victims to heal, prevents demonization of the aggressor, and preserves dignity on all sides.

¹²³ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 132.

¹²⁴ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 125.

¹²⁵ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 126.

¹²⁶ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 127.

¹²⁷ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 128.

¹²⁸ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 125-130.

Bringing it Home:

Practice:

Today we are going to go one step further than last week to the point of discerning a compassionate action. While this lesson has focused largely on compassionate actions with regard to difficult/oppressive/violent situations we are going to focus this process on the people with whom we interact each day.

To begin ground yourself, catch your breath. Take a moment to get comfortable and connect with your breathing. Take some time to mentally go through your day, noticing the people with whom you have interacted and those who may have been present in the periphery. Narrow your thoughts to one of these people – to whom are you most drawn?

- I. Take the PULSE of this person:
 - a. Pay Attention:
 - i. Describe what you see: appearance, posture, expression, behavior, emotions.
 - ii. What might he/she be experiencing? What might be going on in his/her life?
 - b. Understand: Reflect on the potential FLAGS at work: (Use your imagination if necessary)
 - i. What might be his/her deepest fear?
 - ii. What might he/she long for?
 - iii. What aching wounds may he/she be carrying that make this even more painful?
 - iv. What good things or gifts might he/she possess that are being stifled?
 - c. Love: Allow yourself to extend loving compassion to this person.
 - i. How might you care for or extend love to him/her? Reflect on his/her behavior. What might it want you to understand? What healing might this person need?
 - d. Sensing the Sacred: Offer this person into connection with God, allowing the Sacred to encircle him/her. If so moved, offer them up in prayer or write down your thoughts and hopes for this person.
 - e. Embodying new life: Might there be something new at work within this person?
- II. Rest for a few minutes as you hold this person as your intention, what act of compassion might you take toward this person? This act may be anonymous or you may want to share it with them directly.

Spend some time reflecting on this exercise. What creative ideas were birthed? How does offering compassionate action make us feel? Have the participants ever received a compassionate act themselves? Is compassion contagious?

Closing:

In closing, ask participants to take a few minutes reflecting on what they have learned. (See attached evaluation sheet).¹²⁹ Have they learned anything new about themselves? About others? How might they use this process in their everyday lives? What are the challenges/criticisms of what they have learned? How might this process help in reducing anxiety in their lives? (Have them write down some notes on the evals if possible and if you hear other comments that would be helpful for me to know, please take some notes for me).

Is there a compassionate action that the group could take on as a whole? Perhaps in response to a social issue, or community need?

(Optional Exercise: Only do this if participants are comfortable with giving their information, and willing to have a follow up conversation in a few months)

Give each person an index card. On one side have them write: One way in which I will embody compassion in my life is:

On the other side ask them to write their name/address. Collect these cards, as a means to be in contact with each of them within the next three months.

Hand out the Compassion Practice cards for participants to take home.¹³⁰

Close in prayer.

¹²⁹ See Appendix K.

¹³⁰ See Appendix L.

The 4 Components of Nonviolent Communication

developed by Marshall Rosenberg, Ph. D.

Observation: A description of “what’s actually happening” as reported by our senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell), plus our “inner” senses (e.g. our inner voice, vision, thoughts, etc.).

- Direct, Sensory Experience
- “Just the facts.”
- Specific to time and context.
- The highest form of human intelligence.
- Free of judgment, criticism or other forms of analysis.
- The trigger of our experience.

Key Distinction: Observation vs. Observation Mixed with Evaluation

Evaluations are “moral” judgments of good~bad, right~wrong, appropriate~inappropriate that tend to fixed or static

Feeling: Physical Sensations + Emotions

- Feelings are universal.
- The signals we receive from our body alerting us to the state of our needs.
- Feelings are composed of physical sensations (e.g. tight jaw, queasy stomach, smile, etc.) and/or emotions (e.g. sad, glad, mad, disappointment, frustration, guilt, etc.).

Key Distinction: Feeling vs. Thought

- **Thoughts** are cognitive or mental, including beliefs, ideas and opinions

Need: Resources required to sustain and enrich life.

- Needs are universal.
- Transcend cultural mores and conditioning.
- Needs make no reference to any specific person doing any specific thing.
- “Values” are generally equivalent to Needs

Key Distinction: Need vs. Strategy

- A **strategy** is a specific method to fulfill a need

Request: An opportunity to contribute to the well-being of ourself and/or others

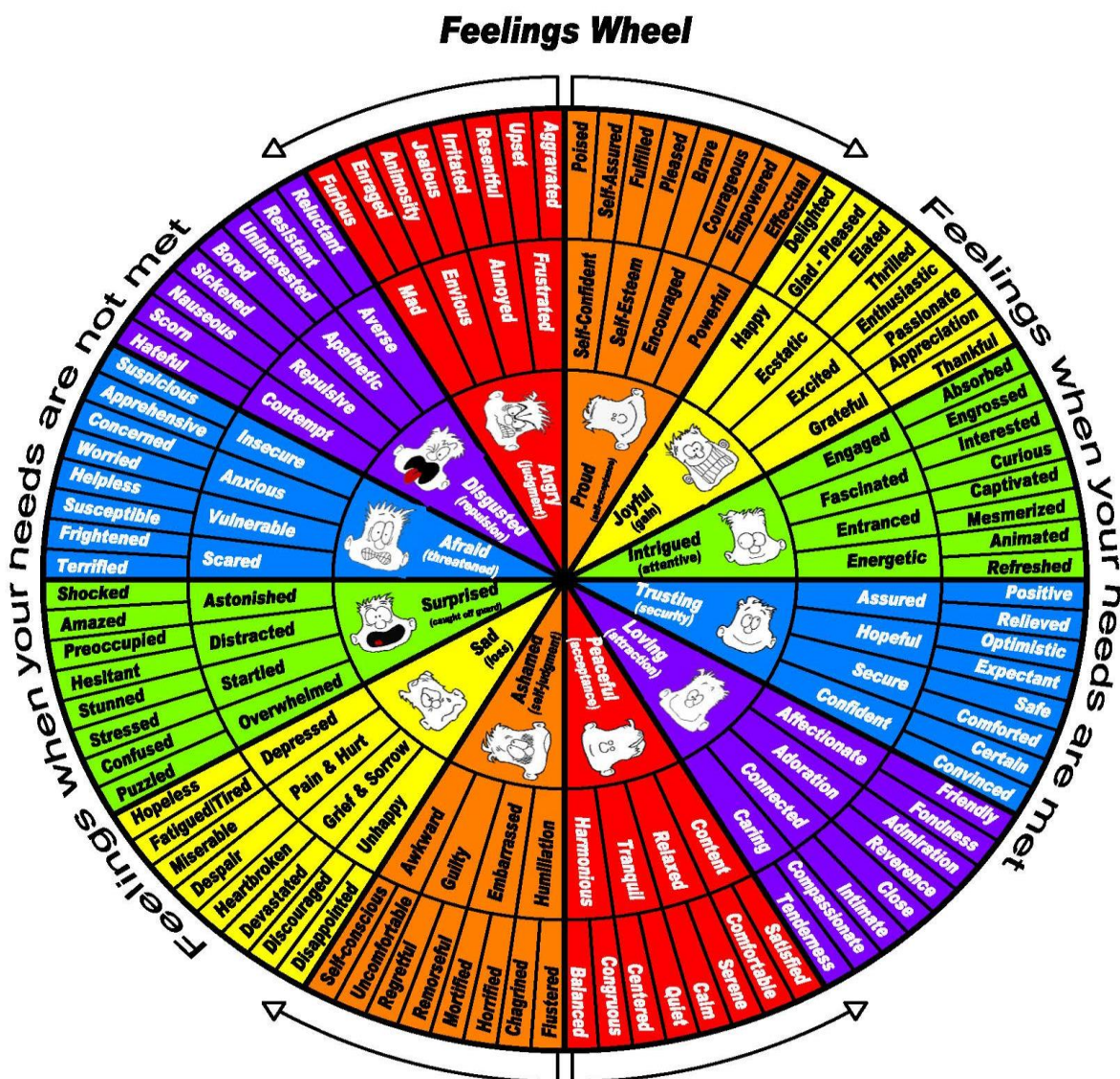
- A concrete offering with the intention of contributing to fulfilling a need.
- Requests are specific actions stated in the positive (what we DO want).
- Immediately doable.
- There are three types of requests:
 - C. Clarity
 - B. feedBack
 - A. Action

Key Distinctions: Request vs Demand; Request vs Wish

- **Demands** include a threat of punishment or the promise of reward linked to a behavior
- **Wishes** tend to be vague, future oriented, and non-specific

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¹³¹ Jim Manske and Jori Manske, “The 4 Components of Nonviolent Communication,” accessed February 16, 2019, <http://radicalcompassion.squarespace.com/files/handouts/>.

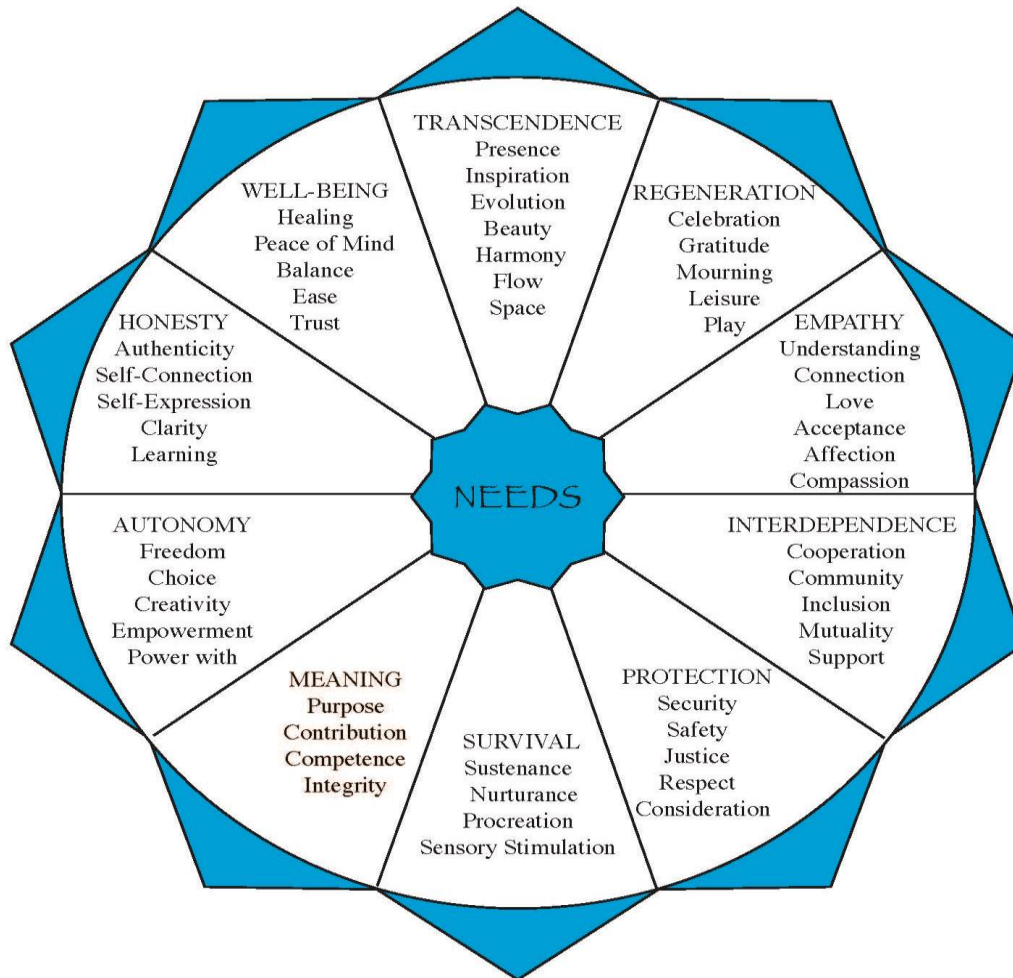


Feelings are **internal** emotions. Words mistaken for emotions, but that are actually thoughts in the form of evaluations and judgments of others, are any words that follow "I feel like ..." or "I feel that ..." or "I feel as if ..." or "I feel you ...", such as:

Abandoned	Attacked	Abused	Betrayed	Blamed	Bullied	Cheated
Coerced	Criticized	Dismissed	Disrespected	Excluded	Ignored	Intimidated
Insulted	Let Down	Manipulated	Misunderstood	Neglected	Put down	Rejected
Unappreciated	Unloved	Unheard	Unwanted	Used	Violated	Wronged

¹³² Bret Stein, "Feelings Wheel," last modified January 1, 2011,
<https://ytp.uoregon.edu/sites/ytp2.uoregon.edu/files/Feelings%20Wheel%20in%20PDF.pdf>.

Appendix I: Needs Wheel¹³³



Needs: Resources required to sustain and enrich life.

Needs are universal.

Needs make no reference to any specific person
doing any specific thing.

Key Distinction: Need vs. Strategy

Inspired by the work of Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D. and Manfred Max-Neef, Ph. D., Chilean economist
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¹³³ Jim Manske and Jori Manske, “Needs Wheel,” accessed February 16, 2019, <http://radicalcompassion.squarespace.com/files/handouts/>.

Appendix J: Session Five NVC Exercise¹³⁴

NETWORK FOR NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

By Jim and Jori Manske

WRITTEN CHECK IN & SELF CONNECTION EXERCISE

Be still for 2 minutes and observe your thoughts.

Go to your heart and notice what the feeling is there. What is the feeling?

Savor that feeling.

What is the need that comes up?

What other needs come up?

What requests can you make based on these needs?

¹³⁴ Jim Manske and Jori Manske, “Written Check in and Self Connection Exercise,” accessed March 1, 2019, https://nvcnextgen.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NVC-Self-Connection_written.pdf.

Appendix K: Optional Course Evaluation

(optional) Name:

What have you learned about yourself throughout these six sessions?

What have you learned about your interactions with others?

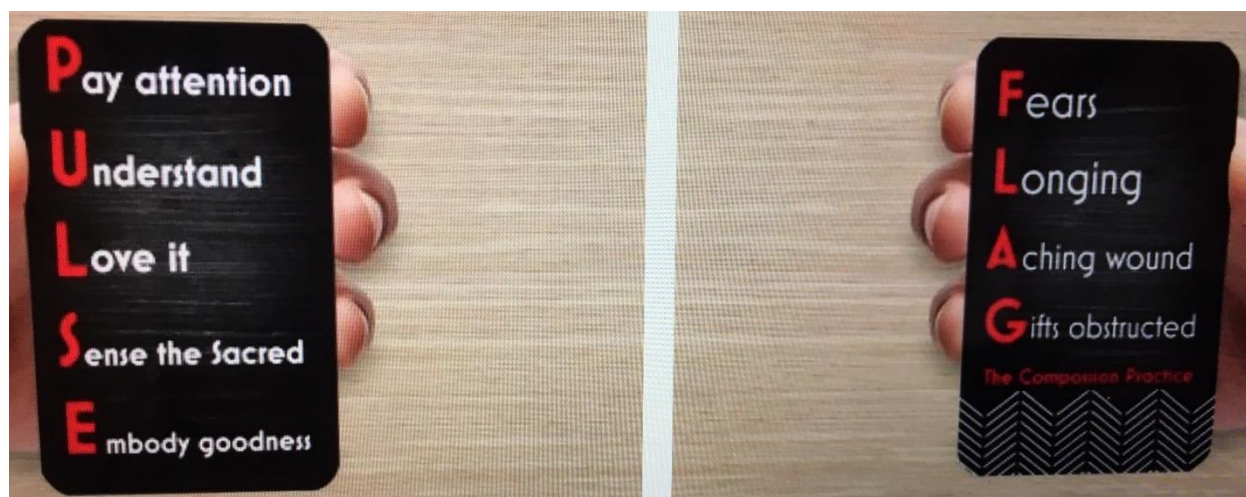
How might you use this process in your everyday lives?

What are the challenges/criticisms of what you have learned?

What skills do you have that have been strengthened throughout the class?

Any additional thoughts/comments?

Appendix L: Photo of Compassion Practice Take Home Card



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